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Ismaili Studies by Russian, Soviet and Post-Soviet Scholars

توانا بود که دانا بود زدانش دل سپهر نابود

Thy source of might is knowledge
Thus old hearts grow young again¹

The Ismailis under Russian and Soviet Rule

The maxim that ‘knowledge is power’ was demonstrated by the campaigns of the imperial powers of Britain and Russia to document and research the areas now under their control. Once any territorial disputes had been settled between them, they embarked on studying and exploring both the region of Central Asia and the people under their colonial rule. Russia’s interest in Ismaili studies is believed to have been provoked by the colonial policies of British India. Earlier in the 13th/19th century, Afghanistan had lost a great part of eastern Pashtunistān to British India. The accession of ‘Abd al-Rahmān Khān to the throne of Afghanistan in 1880 saw him expand his territory to include Kāfiristān, Qaṭaghān, Badakhshān and Chahār-wilāyat. Much of the present northern Afghanistan had already been subdued and his expansionism was certainly a response to British military involvement in his country’s affairs. At the same time, the Russian military presence in Turkestan (present Central Asia) highlighted the region’s geo-political importance, which lay between territories under the effective control of the two imperial powers. As a result, the Pamir region became an area of rivalry between the British and Russian empires, in the struggle referred to as the Great Game. For the Russians this was an

¹ Abulqosim Firdawsī, *Shohnoma*, ed. Kamol Aīynī and Zohir Ahrorī (Dushanbe, 2007), vol. 1, p. 24.

imperial expansionist policy aimed at gaining control over the new territories, while the British lent support to ‘Abd al-Raḥmān Khān, *amīr* of Afghanistan, in order to compensate him for the loss of eastern Pashtunistān. Due to this colonial rivalry there was a need for knowledge about the area, people, culture, religion and geography of the territories occupied.²

Accordingly, the Russian empire, in the British fashion, ordered scholars to begin studying the people and countries of Russian Turkestan.³ This was a time when scholars were given the task of defining priorities in the study of new regions. In this regard Serebrennikov, a Russian explorer of the Pamir region, noted, ‘It is precisely this mountainous country . . . that represents the sources of the Amū Daryā flowing through the whole of Central Asia from the heights of the Pamirs to the Aral Sea and known since ancient times under the name of Oxus.’⁴ Almost in the same manner, M.S. Andreev later wrote in 1905, ‘The pre-Pamiri countries have similarities with the Caucasus in terms of their multitude of ethnographic units. Here, in every valley one can see a distinct dialect and authentic custom that has no analogy even in the most nearby village.’⁵ During the second half of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, a number of archaeological monuments were studied, but the greater

² B. Lashkarbekov, S. Yusufbekov and S. Khodjaniyazov, ‘Ismailism and Central Asian Ismailis in the Russian and Soviet Studies’ (Unpublished Report for the IIS, 2000), p. 11.

³ The first study of this kind was undertaken by Konstantin von Kaufmann (1818–1882), the first Governor-General of Russian Turkestan (1867–1882). *Turkestanskii Al’bom* (The Turkestan Album) is a unique photographic survey dedicated to the history, ethnography, geography, economy and culture of Central Asia.

The Russian Orientalist A.L. Kun (also spelled Kuhn) compiled the first three parts, and the album was formerly referred to as the Kun Collection. Other compilers included M.T. Brodovskii, M.A. Terentyev, N.V. Bogaevskii and the photographer N.N. Nekhoroshev. The Military-Topographic Department, Military District of Tashkent printed the lithographic parts of each plate. The production work was primarily done in St Petersburg and Tashkent in 1871–72. Available online at: https://www.loc.gov/rr/print/coll/287_turkestan.html [last accessed, 7 May 2019]

⁴ A. Serebrennikov, ‘Ocherki Shugnana’ [Sketch of Shugnan], *Voennyi sbornik*, 226 (1896), pp. 1–52; A. Serebrennikov, *Ocherk o Pamire* [Sketch of Pamir] (St Petersburg, 1900), p. 1.

⁵ M.S. Andreev, ‘Bliny v pripamirskikh stranakh’ [Oral Epic in the Pamir Countries], in *TV*, 32 (1905), pp. 3–33.

successes of Russian orientalism were in the fields of historical geography, history, irrigation and numismatics. The pioneering contribution of the eminent Russian Orientalist Vasilii Vladimirovich Bartol'd (1869–1930) to the study of the history of Central Asian peoples has been generally acknowledged by specialists in this field.⁶

Material on the beliefs, culture, way of life, languages and dialects of the Ismaili areas, as well as on the history, political and socio-economic problems faced by the Ismailis, were primarily collected by amateur scholars during secret missions, as military envoys, adventurers from all walks of life, naturalists and officers in the Russian army. A characteristic feature of these studies was a non-differential approach to integrated knowledge. In the 20th century, the salient feature of Soviet scholarship was its ideological focus; a disciplinary approach in studying the Pamir area and the Pamiri people took the general form of a survey that only took account of certain cultural aspects of Ismailism. Soviet ethnographic research began to be shaped along national republic lines and categorised according to the numerous ethnic minorities living in the vast area of the Soviet Union. Along with the Russian scholars, indigenous cadres of various nationalities, including Tajik specialists and a number of Ismailis, participated in these ethnographic surveys.

Under the Soviet regime, the Ismaili-populated areas were studied with reference to the disciplines of archaeology, ethnography, anthropology, linguistics and history. Having identified the cultural peculiarities of the economically and culturally backward peoples in the peripheral areas of Tsarist Russia, Soviet ethnography aimed at defining the specific form of non-capitalist methods to be used in order to develop these peoples along the socialist model. The experience of the first generations of Soviet ethnographers, who began their studies during the pre-revolutionary period, has provided indispensable information. Collecting research material, ethnographic methods, observation, and a scientific approach to material and cultural evidence in pre-Soviet scholarship were the major features in the study of the way of life and culture of these peoples.

Interest in Ismaili studies can be said to have appeared in Russian scholarship during the course of the Russian annexation of Turkestan in the second half of the 19th century, and in connection with the Ismaili

⁶ V.V. Bartol'd, *Four Studies on the History of Central Asia*, tr. V and T. Minorsky, 3 vols (Leiden, Brill: vol. 1, 1956; vol. 2, 1958; vol. 3, 1962).

areas in the region. On the one hand, British colonial rule in India where the Ismaili imams had resided since the 1840s, and on the other hand, the expansionist policy of the Russian empire that had incorporated Ismaili-populated regions, caused the Russians to view the Ismaili imam as an agent of the British imperialists, who could work against Russian interests.⁷ First of all, the Russian consulates in Bombay and Kashgar indicated their alarm and sent reports to the Turkestan Governor-Generalship on the apparently pro-British stance of the Ismaili Imam Sulṭān Muḥammad Shāh, Aga Khan III (d. 1957).⁸ In addition to this, Baron Cherkasov, the Head of the Russian Political Agency in the Turkestan Governor-Generalship, also provided some information on the Tajik Ismailis. In his account, Baron Cherkasov shows little knowledge of Islam, though he was allegedly conversant in Persian. In this reports, he claims that the religion of *Panjtanī* among the Mountain Tajiks, which is how he refers to Ismailism in his report, neglected the usual precepts of Islamic religious duties and obligations.⁹ He added that there was little in terms of religious hierarchy but much worship of saints and sanctuaries.

Aleksei Bobrinskoï, who met three Ismaili *pīrs* in various areas during an expedition in the Pamirs, published a booklet called *Sekta ismail'ia v russkikh i bukharskikh predelakh Srednei Azii* (The Ismaili Sect in Russian and Bukharan Central Asia), which is distinct from his ethnographic study of the Ishkāshimis and Wakhānīs. This booklet consists of interviews with Sayyid Yūsuf 'Alī Shāh, Sayyid Kāẓim and 'Alī Mardān Shāh, well-known Ismaili *pīrs* in the Western Pamirs at the turn of the 20th century. The booklet is not an academic work and is most subjective in relation to the people with whom he spoke and with regard to their beliefs. Despite that, as a result of its publication, Bobrinskoï was considered an authority on the religion of the mountain Tajiks. Either due to his poor Persian, a deficient interpreter, or reluctance on the part of the *pīrs* to initiate an open discussion with an outsider on matters of faith, Bobrinskoï describes the main religious authorities of the Ismailis as illiterate people, who neither understand nor follow Islamic tenets.

⁷ A.V. Stanishevskii, *Ismailizm na Pamire* (1902–1931). *Sbornik dokumentov*, Akademiia Nauk USSR, Glavnoe Archivnoe Upravlenie pri-Sovete Ministrov Uzbekskoi SSR: Institute Vostokovedeniia (Tashkent, 1933).

⁸ On this point see, p. 70 above.

⁹ Baron A. Cherkasov, 'Otchët', in N.A. Khal'fin, *Rossiia i Bukharskii ėmirat na Zapadnom Pamire (koneŝ XIX – nachalo XX v.)* (Moscow, 1975), pp. 104–105.

However, it seems that Bobrinskoï's main issue of concern was the genealogies of the *pīrs*, the number of their followers and the procedure of paying the *zakāt*.¹⁰ Paradoxically, many years later the well-known Russian scholar, Aleksandr A. Semënov, recalled with admiration his meetings with lay Ismailis whom he regarded as 'peasant-philosophers' due to their knowledge of Greek philosophy.¹¹

On the whole, pre-Soviet scholarship did not produce significant works on the Ismailis, and even the reports of the Russian political, military and diplomatic missions generally dealt with the political aspects of the life of the community. The dearth of robust academic literature and the lack of accurate knowledge on the Ismailis and their religious beliefs, history and philosophy as well as the role of their imams, frequently led to misunderstandings about them on the part of other religious groups. However, the archival material collected from diplomatic missions, military service and clandestine documents is still very useful as the historical record of a given era and its ideas, and for the statistical data it provides.

The Ismailis in Soviet Studies

Most studies on the Ismailis during the Soviet era were carried out on the basis of Marxist-Leninist ideology. The aim of Marxism was, in fact, to fight for the transformation of society on a national and international scale, and it considered religion as a factor leading to class division in human society.¹² Religious studies were to be approached in the light of historical Marxism, which, by nature stands in contradiction to religious ideas and teachings.¹³ Meanwhile, the Soviet government initiated a scrupulous study of religion 'per se'. These measures can be said, in the broader sense of the word, to have been undertaken as part of an atheist campaign to eradicate religion, 'the opium of the masses', as well as part

¹⁰ Bobrinskoï, 'Sekta ismail'ia', pp. 1–20.

¹¹ A.A. Semënov, 'Iz oblasti religioznykh verovaniï shugnanskikh ismailitov' [On the Realm of the Religious Belief of the Shugnani Ismailis], *MI*, 1 (1912), p. 523.

¹² Georgi Plekhanov, *Selected Philosophical Works*, vol. 3 (Moscow, 1976), pp. 117–183.

¹³ Dimitry V. Pospelovsky, *A History of Marxist-Leninist Atheism and Soviet Anti-Religious Policies*, vol. 1: *A History of Soviet Atheism in Theory, and Practice, and the Believer* (New York, 1987), p. 11.

of the implementation of the grand project to reinterpret the past along the lines of Marxist theory. Communist agitators argued that religion being reactionary was the instrument of class enemies and a remnant of imperialism.¹⁴ The study of Islam materialised in this hostile environment. A book by a leading Soviet scholar on Islamic studies, Nikolai Smirnov, reflects this policy. Smirnov's book¹⁵ begins with a reference to Marx and Lenin's critique of religion and the religious *Weltanschauung*; it pays great attention to presenting the social function of religion as an instrument of a class-ridden society, and exposing the class character of the activities of religious organisations which were aimed at protecting the interests of the oppressor class.¹⁶ The book, which was regarded as a major work on the study of Islam, is in two parts: (i) from the first encounters of the *Kievan Rus'* (East Slavic tribes) with Muslims in the 7th/13th to the early 20th century; (ii) from the period following the October Revolution up to the early 1950s. The work analyses various aspects of Islam such as the religion and culture of Muslims from historical, social and political perspectives, from the early days of Islam through its development and expansion into different lands. It also provides different studies of the Russian people, in particular their intellectual perception of Islam over the course of history. However, as the author argues, 'the study [. . .] of Islam and the religious organisations in the history of the East and of modern life, in particular, shows up the role of Islam as an instrument of imperialist policy used for the colonial enslavement of the people of the East; [this] is the most important task for Soviet historians.'¹⁷

Following these premises, Ismailism, alongside all other religious traditions, came under attack in several studies written during the Soviet era. As regards the Ismailis, the prejudices were twofold: not only did Soviet scholars engage in Ismaili studies from a Marxist ideological perspective, but they were also victims of the bias in the historical sources which they used when writing about the Ismailis. These anti-Ismaili sources had been influenced by the polemical writings of earlier Sunni authors such as Abū 'Abd Allāh Muḥammad b. 'Alī b. Rizām al-Kūfī, better known as Ibn Rizām, who lived in Baghdad during the first half of

¹⁴ Vladimir Lenin, 'Novaia Zhizn', in *Lenin: Collected Works*, vol. 10 (Moscow, 1965), pp. 83–87.

¹⁵ N.A. Smirnov, *Ocherki Istorii Izucheniia Islama v SSSR* (Moscow, 1954).

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 263.

the 4th/10th century and Abū Maṣṣūr ‘Abd al-Qāhir b. Ṭāhir al-Baghdādī (d. 429/1037). F. Daftary, in his studies, has demonstrated that the Sunni polemicists and heresiographers often deliberately incorporated or fabricated anti-Ismaili accounts in their writings.¹⁸ Also the establishment of an Ismaili state centered at the fortress of Alamūt under the leadership of Ḥasan-i Ṣabbāḥ (d. 518/1124), and Ismaili opposition to the Saljūq Turks, who ruled the eastern Islamic lands of Iran and Central Asia and who supported the Abbasid caliphs, led to further Sunni reaction against the Ismailis in general, and the Nizārī Ismailis of Persia and Syria in particular. The new literary campaign was initiated and led by Niẓām al-Mulk, vizier of the Saljūq sultan Malik-Shāh (r. 465–485/1072–1092). He was one of the most fervent opponents of the Ismailis and of their *da‘wa*, and his *Siyāsāt-nāma*, a work in the Mirror for Princes genre, has been regarded as one of the important sources, albeit from the viewpoint of a staunch opponent, on early Ismaili *da‘wa* activity in Persia and Khurāsān.¹⁹ He devoted a chapter in the *Siyāsāt-nāma* to condemnation of the Ismailis and an account as he saw it of their history to date. However, the earliest polemical treatise against the Persian Ismailis and their doctrine of *ta‘līm* (the authoritative teaching in religion of an imam in every age after the Prophet Muhammad) was written by al-Ghazālī (450–505/1058–1111).²⁰ He was, in fact, commissioned by the Abbasid caliph al-Mustazhir (487–512/1094–1118) to produce a major treatise in refutation of the Bāṭinīs, a demeaning designation meaning ‘esotericists’ coined for the Ismailis by their adversaries.²¹ He completed this task in the Niẓāmiyya madrasa in Baghdad in 488/1095.

These were the kinds of primary sources by Muslim writers that were examined by Russian and Soviet scholars who also used a number of medieval European works based on the distorted images derived from the Crusaders who, despite military and diplomatic encounters with the Fatimids in Egypt and the Nizārī Ismailis in Syria, had remained unversed in the teachings of Islam and notably Ismaili beliefs, and engaged in

¹⁸ Farhad Daftary, ‘Sunni Perceptions of the Ismailis: Medieval Perspectives’ in Orkhan Mir-Kasimov, ed., *Intellectual Interactions in the Islamic World: The Ismaili Thread* (London, 2020), pp. 13–26.

¹⁹ Daftary, *The Ismā‘īlīs* (2nd ed., Cambridge, 2007), p. 209.

²⁰ See Farouk Mitha, *Al-Ghazālī and the Ismailis: A Debate on Reason and Authority in Medieval Islam* (London, 2003).

²¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 26–27. Daftary, *The Ismā‘īlīs* (2nd ed., Cambridge, 2007), pp. 10–11.

fanciful speculations and the fabrication of legends developing the stories of the Ismailis' Muslim opponents yet further.²²

Defamation of the Ismailis of Badakhshān and their leader, the Aga Khan, was not a Soviet invention, but dated back to the time of the Russian empire and the rivalry between the colonial powers. At that time, the Russian colonial rulers erroneously considered Aga Khan III a British agent.²³ Soviet Communist scholars continued with the same imperial misperception. This is demonstrated by Maïskii's 1935 statement, 'Ismailism is the ideology of the feudal aristocracy, and it is clear that the ideology of the class could not be the enemy of the same class. The modern Ismaili caliph – Sulṭān Muḥammad Shāh, Aga Khan III – is a major bourgeois politician and a staunch supporter of the British Raj in India.'²⁴

It was this alleged support for the British in India that was the reason for the Communist government in Moscow clinging on to the pre-Soviet vision of Aga Khan III. The Aga Khan had appealed to his *murīds* (his followers) in India and Central Asia to lend their support to the British during the Second World War. The hardening of Soviet policy vis-à-vis the Ismailis, as mentioned, justified and encouraged Soviet scholars in taking a more aggressive stance in their works. The writings of these scholars are sometimes not far short of prejudice due to their continuous reliance on the medieval sources. G. Ashurov (1930–2020), E. Bertel's (1890–1957), A. Bertel's (1926–1995), A. Bogoutdinov (1911–1970), E. Braginskii (1905–1989), B. Ghafurov (1908–1977), A. Zakuev (1988–1968), L. Klimovich (1907–1989), A. Semënov (1873–1958), L. Stroeva (1910–1993) and Kh. Dodikhudoev (1936–2021), were all Soviet scholars who directly or indirectly studied the Ismailis. The scholars who dealt more strictly with the philosophical aspect of the Ismailis were A. Bogoutdinov, S. Grigorian (1920–1974), A. Sagadeyev (1931–1997) and O. Trakhtenberg

²² Farhad Daftary, 'Wladimir Ivanow and Modern Ismaili Studies', in Stanislav M. Prozorov and Hakim Elnazarov, ed., *Russian Scholars on Ismailism* (St Petersburg, 2014), pp. 24–37. Also, Farhad Daftary, *The Assassin Legends: Myths of the Isma'ilis* (London, 1994), pp. 62–64.

²³ Khaëlbek Dodikhudoev, *Mazhabi Ismoiliā va mohiāti ijtimoi on. Rohhoi bartaraf namudani boqimondai din* [Ismaili Belief and its Social Aspects. Ways to Eliminate a Religious Remnant] (Dushanbe, 1967), pp. 38–41.

²⁴ P.M. Maïskii, 'Sledy drevnikh verovaniĭ v pamirskom ismailizme' [Traces of Ancient Beliefs in Pamiri Ismailism], *Sovetskaia ètnografiā*, 3 (1935), pp. 48–58, especially p. 58.

(1889–1959).²⁵ Soviet studies were diametrically opposed to what came to be identified as ‘bourgeois orientalist scholarship’. The ideological tendentiousness and consequences of the myopia of Soviet scholarship becomes more obvious in the work of these scholars, as for example, in the work of Dodikhudoev, who has produced several books, numerous articles and delivered countless lectures on Ismaili philosophy.²⁶

Review of the Literature on the Ismailis in Soviet Scholarship

Khaëlbek Dodikhudoev is an important and interesting case for this study as well as for the further development of Ismaili studies in the post-Soviet era. Firstly, Dodikhudoev was regarded as a major scholar in the field of Ismaili studies, during both the Soviet and post-Soviet periods; secondly, even though he was a product of Soviet schooling, Dodikhudoev also had the advantage of being born into an Ismaili family in Badakhshān of Tajikistan. Thirdly, as a dynamic scholar during both the Soviet and post-Soviet eras, his scholarship will also be examined in terms of the shift in Ismaili studies since the disintegration of the Soviet Union in the section below entitled ‘Review of the Literature on the Ismailis in Post-Soviet Scholarship’.²⁷ During the Soviet period, Dodikhudoev’s views about the origins of the Ismaili movement were in line with the Marxist understanding of religion. While this view was shared by the above-mentioned colleagues and scholars, Dodikhudoev argued that an analysis of the secondary literature shows two opposing attitudes towards the medieval Ismaili movement:

According to the one, held mainly by the bourgeois orientalists, the intellectual speculations of the Ismailis not only did not go beyond the

²⁵ O.B. Trakhtenberg, *Ocherki po istorii zapandno-evropeiskoi srednevekovoi filosofii* [Essays on the History of Western European Medieval Philosophy] (Moscow, 1957); A.V. Sagadeev and S.N. Grigorĭan, tr., *Iz istorii filosofii Srednei Azii i Iran VII–XII vv.* [On the History of the Philosophy of Central Asia and Iran, VII–XII Century] (Moscow, 1960); A.M. Bogoutdinov, ed., *Istoriia filosofii* [The History of Philosophy], vol. 1 (Moscow, 1957), pp. 239–249.

²⁶ In a recent publication Dodikhudoev admitted that ideological restrictions were in place in Ismaili studies during the Soviet period. Dodikhudoev, *Filosofskii ismailizm* [Philosophical Ismailism] (Dushanbe, 2014), pp. 6–7.

²⁷ For more discussion on Dodikhudoev see, pp. 108–115.

framework of Islamic dogmas, but, on the contrary, refined them. Therefore, the accusations against the Ismailis of heresy, atheism and allegations of socialist inclinations are groundless. W.A. Ivanow, A. Ismail, H. Corbin, A. Nanji, S.H. Naşr and others hold this viewpoint.²⁸

At the same time, Dodikhudoev, like his Soviet contemporaries, adopted the second interpretation with regard to the emergence of the Ismaili movement which is in line with the official Marxist approach to the study of religion:

...Ismailism initially emerged from contradictions within the Shi'i Imamate. With a series of doctrinal changes in virtually all aspects, including theological, philosophical and socio-political ones, the movement grew into a powerful counter-weight to the Sunni orthodoxy and to Shi'ism itself, while it invariably bore an implicit mark of popular aspirations. This point of view has been promoted by a number of scholars and students of the history and doctrine of Ismailism, including A.M. Bogoutdinov, B.G. Ghafurov, L.V. Stroeveva, Alessandro Bausani, H. Enayat, K. Keshawarz, Hermann Ley, Bernard Lewis and Ehsan Tabari.²⁹

Moreover, the excessive reliance of Soviet scholars on medieval sources that were opposed to the Ismailis was not incidental since it conformed to the Marxist understanding of the emergence of religions as a part of the class struggle between different groups in society. The medieval sectarian discourse provided evidence for the analysis of the social system because, in the Marxist view, orthodox and heterodox schools have often corresponded to the respective ideologies of the antagonistic classes. Within this framework, Dodikhudoev assumed a pragmatic stance, perhaps on the basis that the dominant Marxist ideology allowed for a reinterpretation of Ismaili philosophy as one of rebellion and as a form of medieval freethinking, with this reinterpretation disguised as atheist propaganda and as essentially founded on anti-Islamic agendas. Therefore, Dodikhudoev may have viewed Ismailism as a medieval sectarian discourse on political philosophy, a theory initially laid out by Soviet

²⁸ Khaëlbek Dodikhudoev, *Filosofiâ krest'iânskogo bunta: O roli srednevekovogo ismailizma v razvitii svobodomyслиâ na musul'manskom Vostoke* [The Philosophy of a Peasant Revolt: The Role of Medieval Ismailism in the Development of Thought in the Muslim East] (Dushanbe, 1987), p. 6.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 7.

Oriental Studies and by the Soviet Tajik scholar Bobojon Ghafurov. The latter's main work *Tadzhiki* (The Tajiks) traces the history of the Tajiks from ancient times. The sections of the book on the Ismailis and Qarmaṭīs during the Sāmānid era best illustrate partisan scholarship with reference to medieval Sunni sources. Ghafurov argued that the rise of the Qarmaṭīs was related to the internal weaknesses of the Sāmānid state, relying on the material in *al-Kāmil fi'l-ta'rikh* by Ibn al-Athīr (555–630/1160–1233), a Sunni historian of the medieval era, to develop his argument. He also linked the Qarmaṭī movement to the major uprisings that occurred under the leadership of the Ismaili *dā'ī* al-Marvazī who was defeated in 306/918, first in Herat and then in Nishāpūr.³⁰

Equally, Ghafurov could not, or intentionally did not, draw a distinction between the Qarmaṭīs and the Ismailis, as was the case with many Soviet and post-Soviet scholars.³¹ He uses the taxonyms Qarmaṭī and Ismaili interchangeably, apparently with the meaning of an anti-bourgeois community. In his analysis, the bourgeois class confronted a rival utilitarian aristocracy who skilfully manipulated mass discontent to their own advantage. In this manner, underlying religious sensitivities prevailed over ideological commitment. Ghafurov cleverly embarks on speculation about the dualist nature of the Qarmaṭī movement in which the peasants are again betrayed by their masters. Further in the same work, when discussing the Saljūqs and the era of the Khwārazm-Shāhs from the 5th/11th to the 7th/13th century, Ghafurov defines Ismaili doctrine as distinct from the beliefs of the Qarmaṭīs, but nonetheless considers the Ismaili *da'wa* as an extension of the early Qarmaṭī movement: 'The movement, now renamed Ismailism, came to be used by local feudal rulers in their struggle against the Saljūqs. The Ismaili sect with its new programme of action, transformed itself into a clandestine terrorist organisation'.³² Every now and then Ghafurov moves back and forth between class and ethnic differentiation by writing of the natural anti-Turk and pro-Tajik (Persian) stance of the Ismailis.

³⁰ B. Ghafurov, *Istoriia Tadzhikskogo Naroda v Kratkom Izlozhenii. S Drevneishikh vremien do velikoĭ Oktiabrskoĭ Revolutsii 1917* [The History of the Tajik People in Summary. From Ancient Times to the Great October Revolution in 1917], vol. 1. (Moscow, 1952), pp. 201–203. For the *dā'ī* al-Marvazī, see also Chapter 1 of this work, pp. 7–8, and 10.

³¹ This point will be further illustrated in the section 'Review of the Literature on the Ismailis in Soviet Scholarship', pp. 71–90.

³² Ghafurov, *Istoriia Tadzhikskogo Naroda*, p. 202.

Bobojon Ghafurov (1908–1977)

Ghafurov was not alone in his claims, as the same view was supported by a range of Soviet scholars, including Bertel's and Stroevea who regarded the Ismailis and their ideology as a 'class struggle in feudal societies of the Middle East'.³³ The Ismailis have been described as an extreme religious group who from the early days of their religious formation up to the Fatimid and later Alamūt periods terrorised their political and religious opponents in order to achieve their ultimate goals. Furthering his argument, Ghafurov also accused Aga Khan III of being a lackey of the British monarchy.³⁴

However, to be fair, not all scholarly works were composed in line with Marxist ideology and neither did all academics succumb to bias in their pursuit of Ismaili studies. During the Second World War, particularly after 1943, there was a positive shift in Soviet policy towards religion and

³³ A.E. Bertel's, *Nasir-i Khosrov i ismailizm* [Nāṣir-i Khusraw and Ismailism] (Moscow, 1959). Ljudmila V. Stroevea, 'Ismailiti Irana i Sirii v zarubezhnoi i sovetskoj literature' [Soviet and Foreign Historiographical Literature on the Ismailis of Iran and Syria v XI–XII Centuries], in *Istoriografiâ i istochnikovedenie istorii stran Azii* (Leningrad, 1965), pp. 138–148.

³⁴ B. Ghafurov, 'Aga Khan', *Journal Bezbozhnik* [The Atheist], 10–11 (1940), pp. 8–9.

religious ceremonies.³⁵ The reasons for this are to be found in the Soviet authorities' general effort to acquire the maximum support of the Soviet people in the 'patriotic war' against Nazi Germany. They eventually eased some of the restrictions on religious authorities performing religious duties and ceremonies. This also created opportunities for academics to carry on with their work freely. Certainly, this policy played a positive role in the study of religion, and consequently the lion's share of academic literature on the Ismailis was produced at that time. The Soviet government became more tolerant towards religion, and even though the relatively short-lived rule of the Soviet leader, Nikita S. Khrushchev (r. 1953–1964), brought back some restrictions, it was a time when a new generation of scholars emerged who were more disposed towards academic success and achievement in contrast to the first generations of military officers or government agents who were commissioned for the service of Imperial Russia and the Communist Party. There are indeed exceptions in terms of impartial scholarship which did not necessarily yield to strict ideological demands and state-sponsored interpretations. Many studies regarding the study of Ismaili history, philosophy, rituals and beliefs were conducted to a high academic standard and these have been held in considerable respect by modern scholars studying the Ismailis of Badakhshān.

Badakhshān, as mentioned earlier, is a land-locked region surrounded by the high Pamir Mountains which have protected and preserved not only the community but also ancient rituals, cultural traditions and linguistic diversity. Persian has served as a lingua franca between speakers of the various Pamiri languages, and between them and the rest of the Persian-speaking world. Moreover in Badakhshān, Persian is the language used for most works of religious literature as well as other literature, notably poetry. It was the beauty of the manuscripts and a fascination with calligraphy that attracted Russian scholars to Ismaili studies and the study of Ismaili rituals, traditions and practices. One of the most dynamic scholars in the field of Ismaili studies was Aleksandr A. Semënov, whose output included more than twenty articles along with the partial translation of Nāṣir-i Khusraw's *Wajh-i dīn* into Russian, and encompassed

³⁵ Ro'i Yaacov, *Islam in the Soviet Union: From the Second World War to Gorbachev* (New York, 2000). Also, Timur Dadabaev, 'Religiosity and Soviet "Modernisation" in Central Asia: Locating Religious Traditions and Rituals in Recollections of Antireligious Policies in Uzbekistan', *Religion, State and Society*, 32, 4 (2014), p. 331.

an edition of the work of Fidā'i Khurāsānī's *Kitāb Hidāyat al-mu'minīn al-ṭālibīn* with an extensive introduction. Furthermore, he also devoted several articles to Ismaili studies. One of these was 'Iz oblasti religioznykh verovaniĭ shugnanskikh ismailitov' (On the Realm of the Religious Beliefs of the Ismailis of Shughnān); Semēnov collected the material for this article in 1912 as a scholar, while still in the service of the colonial administration. The article describes many aspects of Shughnānī Nizārī Ismaili doctrine on the concept of God and the creation of the world. He argued that even though a thousand years had passed since the spread of Islam amongst the mountain Tajiks, people were still able to maintain ancient beliefs, and Islam had not be able to completely supercede the primitive beliefs of the people including the role of the *pīrs* who played an important part in the daily lives of the mountain Tajiks. 'Ismailitskaia oda, posviashchennaia voploshcheniū Aliia v boga' (An Ismaili Ode Dedicated to the Incarnation of God in 'Alī) is concerned with an Ismaili ode, the *qaṣīda-i-Dhurriya* by Raqqāmī Khurāsānī, which Semēnov understood as dedicated to the incarnations of what he referred to as 'Alī-God. In the article he argued that in what he termed 'classical Ismailism' there is no special concept such as *sharī'a*, *ma'rifa* and *haqīqa*, as in Sufism. However, beginning from 7th–8th/13th–14th centuries after the fall of the Nizārī state, Ismaili approaches assimilated Sufi ones to some extent. Hence Sufi religious concepts and terms are visible in some of the Ismaili writings of this period which are influenced by Sufism, and therefore the studies of individual Ismaili scholars were compiled in the spirit of Sufism. In 'Nasyri Khosrov o mire dukhovnom i material'nom' (Nāṣir-i Khusraw on the Spiritual and Material Worlds), Semēnov says that, according to Nāṣir-i Khusraw, the spiritual world was first created, and then the natural world appeared from it.

Nāṣir-i Khusraw believed the spiritual world to be absolute, wise, graceful, scientific, majestic and revered. The cause of the material world is the imperfection of the Universal Soul, by virtue of which it is considered lower in degree and rank than the Universal Intellect. This world belongs to the Universal Soul, as it serves as the main source through which the Universal Soul corrects its imperfections. 'Protivorechiia vo vzgliadakh na pereselenie dush u pamirskikh ismailitov i u Nasyr-i Khosrova' (Contradictions in the Views on Metempsychosis in the Works of Nāṣir-i Khusraw and Pamiri Ismailis), is a study on the highest degree of accomplishments of the human soul which can only be achieved with a knowledge of the meaning and value of this material world. 'Sheikh Dzhelal-ud-Din-Rumi po predstavleniām shugnanskikh ismailitov' (The

Aleksandr Aleksandrovich Semënov (1873–1958)

Shughnānī Ismailis' View of Shaykh Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī), is an article which begins with an introduction by Semënov and was written on the basis of recorded conversations with a resident of the Shughnān district whose name, for some reason, was not given. It deals with the meetings and conversations between Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī and Shams-i Tabrīzī. In 'Vzgliād na Koran v vostochnom ismailizme' (The Qur'an from the Viewpoint of Oriental Ismailism), Semënov expressed his personal fascination with the Ismaili philosophical interpretation of the Qur'an. In particular, Nāṣir-i Khusraw's arguments and interpretation of Qur'anic verses and in *Wajh-i dīn* appeared to Semënov so far advanced from the ossified forms of Islamic orthodoxy that it could be easily modified to the needs of time and environment.³⁶ These works and others are saturated with creative ideas reflecting the historical reality of the Ismailis of Central Asia.

³⁶ For further details on all these works see Chapter 3.

Wladimir Alekseevich Ivanow (1886–1970)

It is unarguable that Wladimir Ivanow, who also worked for the Asiatic Museum of the (Imperial) Russian Academy of Sciences as well as later on for the Asiatic Society of Bengal in Calcutta in the 1920s, made great contributions to Ismaili studies.³⁷ Since he was commissioned in 1931 by the Ismaili Imam Aga Khan III, to research the manuscripts and literature related to the history and doctrines of the Ismailis, it has often been thought that he evinced great sympathy for Ismaili doctrines. However, more to the point, he had unprecedented access to sources in India and later Pakistan, Iran and Central Asia. He also spent much time at the seat of Aga Khan III in Bombay. As a result, besides the publication of Ismaili manuscripts, he also published numerous articles on Ismaili doctrines and philosophy. Being at the heart of the Ismaili community, he had access to archives and other privately owned materials and documents and so he was in a far better position to tackle issues related to Ismaili studies than other scholars. Meanwhile, he was troubled by how some historical sources were full of contradictions and biases against the Ismailis, whereas he saw the Ismailis as a purely defensive community

³⁷ Farhad Daftary, *Fifty Years in the East: The Memoirs of Wladimir Ivanow* (London, 2015), p. 70.

struggling against fanatical persecution. This view differed from that of his contemporaries, who considered Ismailism a 'class struggle', and identified Ismaili *dā'īs* as 'secret agents', 'troublemakers' and 'assassins'. Ivanow did not regard these writers as scholars but rather as rumour-pedlars. For him the Ismaili *dā'īs* were 'prominent public and political figures' who occupied a special place not only in the history of the Ismaili community, but in the Muslim *umma* as a whole due to their extensive knowledge and contributions in various fields of learning such as philosophy and theology.³⁸

Another important scholar in the field of Ismaili Studies was the great ethnographer, Mikhail Stepanovich Andreev, author of the book *Tadzhiki Doliny Khuf* (The Tajiks of the Khuf Valley). He was a pioneer in the study of the rituals and ceremonies of the Ismaili Tajiks of the Khuf Valley, situated in the present-day Rūshān district of the GBAO. This work is considered to be the most valuable ethnographical study written on the Ismaili inhabitants of Badakhshān.³⁹ However, Andreev's study displays the influence of the pre-revolutionary Russian ethnographer-collectors, who limited themselves to describing certain aspects of the life and culture of the people under study. As a result, Andreev's scholarly interpretation of the material presented in the work cannot fully satisfy the reader. A number of important social occurrences of the time are not given an accurate explanation. For example, the book says very little about the representatives of the privileged class in Shughnān and Rūshān and about their relationship with the *al-fuqarā'* tax-paying class. The author does not disclose the presence of slave labour in the Pamir region, in particular in Khuf itself. He explains the local rulers practice of selling local people they ruled over exclusively on the basis of religious beliefs. Andreev writes that the Shughnān *shāhs* could 'without disturbing their religious conscience, calmly enslave and sell in bondage their own subjects, infidels for them (the Ismailis), which they could not do according to their religious beliefs, if these subjects were Sunni.' The Shughnān *shāhs* were mostly Sunnis of foreign origin, it is true. However, this practice of theirs was not only engaged in for religious motives, but

³⁸ For a full bibliography of Ivanow's works see, *Fifty Years in the East: The Memoirs of Wladimir Ivanow*, edited with annotations by Farhad Daftary (London, 2015).

³⁹ M.S. Andreev, *Tadzhiki Doliny Khuf (Verkhov'ia Amu Dar' ia)* [The Tajiks of the Khuf Valley (The Upper Reaches of the Amū Daryā)] (Stalinabad, Part 1, 1953; Part 2, 1958).

Mikhail Stepanovich Andreev (1873–1948)

was the result of social attitudes and conditions. Put briefly, the rulers of the Pamir countries were vassals of Badakhshān, and they were obliged to include a number of slaves for the *amīr* of Badakhshān in the tribute they sent to him.⁴⁰

Another prominent Russian-Soviet scholar was Andreï Evgen'evich Bertel's, who dedicated his life to textual studies. Like his father Evgeniï Ėduardovich Bertel's, a scholar of remarkably high stature, outstanding scholarship and erudition, he was also a prolific writer.

His extensive studies covered a wide range of themes in classical Persian and Tajik literature. In particular, his elegant translations of Ḥāfiz, Rūmī and other famous Persian poets into Russian with commentaries, and numerous works and articles written in perfect Persian, brought him deserved fame even in Iran. His father, Evgeniï Bertel's, wrote the entry on Nāṣir-i Khusraw in the *Encyclopedia of Islam*⁴¹ as well as the Russian translation of Nāṣir-i Khusraw's *Safar-nāma*. He was one of the first Soviet scholars to regard Nāṣir-i Khusraw as an

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 29.

⁴¹ Evgeniï Bertel's, 'Nāṣir Khusraw', *EI2*, pp. 869–870.

Evgeniĭ Ėduardovich Bertel's (1890–1957)

advocate of the rights of the peasants in their struggle against the ruling class. In the preface to the *Safar-nāma*, he emphasises Nāṣir-i Khusraw's important role in teaching and spreading the Ismaili *da'wa* among the Pamiri Tajiks. However, according to Evgeniĭ Bertel's, in his time Ismailism was no longer fighting against feudalism, but rather had become an instrument of British imperialism.⁴²

His son, Andreĭ Bertel's, wrote *Nasir-i Khosrov i Ismailizm* (Nāṣir-i Khusraw and Ismailism),⁴³ a serious pioneering study in Soviet scholarship, and maintained the same standard for subsequent studies. Andreĭ Bertel's addressed the development of Ismailism during the time of Nāṣir-i Khusraw against the backdrop of contemporary social life. He explored Nāṣir's role, which he analysed through an examination of his philosophical treatises and poetry. He also organised a number of field expeditions to Badakhshān, including one in 1959–1963 under the aegis

⁴² Evgeniĭ Bertel's, 'Vstuplenie', in *Safar-namê*, p. 17.

⁴³ Andreĭ Bertel's, *Nasir-i Khosrov i ismailizm* [Nāṣir-i Khusraw and Ismailism]. AN USSR, IV (Moscow, 1959).

of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR and the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Tajikistan. The expedition headed by Bertel's discovered many rare manuscripts, which are now preserved in the Rudaki Institute of Oriental Studies and the Written Heritage in Dushanbe. In 1959–1960, he discovered a highly significant Ismaili manuscript which consisted of five philosophical epistles and critically edited the text under the title *Pîât' filosofskikh traktatov na temu Āfāq va Anfus* (On the Relationship Between Man and the Universe) providing an extensive commentary.⁴⁴ The epistles deal with various aspects of Ismaili doctrine, such as the relationship between microcosm and macrocosm, and between Man and Universe. On the basis of these field trips and the materials discovered, in 1971 and 1972 a local scholar, Amirbek Habibov (1916–1998), produced two monographs entitled *On the History of Tajik Literature in Badakhshān* and *The Treasures of Badakhshān*.⁴⁵ Also as a result of these expeditions, Bahodur Iskandarov published his edition of a work by two local scholars, Qurbān Muḥammad-zāda (aka Ākhūnd Sulaymān, d. 1953) and Muḥabbat Shāh-zāda (aka Shāh Fitūr, d. 1959), *Istoriā Badakhshana*, in Moscow in 1973 with an extensive introduction.

Perhaps the best example of Ismaili studies in the Soviet period is provided by the writings of Līudmila V. Stroeva (1910–1993). Her major works are: *Dvizhenie Ismailitov v Isfakhane v 1100–1107 gg.* (The Ismaili Movement in Isfahan in 1101–1107) and *K Voprosu O Sotsial'noi Prirode Ismailitskogo Dvizheniia v Irane v XI–XIII vv.* (On the Problem of the Social Nature of the Ismaili Movement in Iran in the 11th–13th Centuries). Even within the ideological constraints of the time, in her studies Stroeva managed to draw a realistic picture of the last years of the Ismaili state of Alamūt. *Gosudarstvo Ismailitov v Irane v 11–13vv.*, leaving aside some compulsory ideological 'embellishment', may be the least biased study of Ismaili history in Russian. Here is an extract from her writings:

From the beginning of the 13th century, the Ismaili state received a large number of Muslims who emigrated there from various feudal estates.

⁴⁴ The published edition contains five philosophical treatises written in Persian in the 5th/11th to 7th/13th centuries: – [Maḥmūd b. 'Abd al-Karīm Shabistārī] *Mir'āt al-muḥaqqiqīn*, ['Aziz al-Dīn Nasafī] *Zubdat al-haqā'iq*, *Umm al-Kitāb*, *Uṣūl al-ādāb* and *Āfāq-nāma*.

⁴⁵ For more details about these publications, see Chapter 3.

This seems to have been due to the conducive policy of Jalāl al-Dīn Ḥasan – *Naw-Musulmān* (New Muslim). Even later, the Ismaili state began to attract many people because of its economic prosperity. . . the attraction being that in the Ismaili lands any people, even enemies of the Ismailis, could find refuge and political asylum. This tradition was never violated and was known far and wide.⁴⁶

In her work, Stroeva expounded upon the Ismaili movement in Iran and Syria between the 3rd and 7th/9th and 13th centuries, presenting it as a popular movement of the masses aimed at social emancipation and liberation under the leadership of Ḥasan-i Šabbāḥ (440s–518/1050s–1124) and his disciples.⁴⁷ As for the methods of ‘individual terror’ attributed to them, Stroeva contended that it was a class war waged against the stratum of exploiters.⁴⁸ Class-consciousness, according to Stroeva, was their central motive because:

The overwhelming majority of the population, the rank and file Ismailis, were occupied in agriculture, cattle breeding and handicrafts. From among them personnel for military raids were recruited, and likewise from among them came forth the *fidā’is*. They carried on their shoulders the burden of public welfare (construction, irrigation and repair, etc.). Freedom from the political domination of the [Turks] gave them a deep sense of satisfaction. *Al-da‘wa al-jadīda* (the new preaching) became a profound articulation of this victory, of complete independence, and of state-building. In it they found their faith in the Imam, who, in their minds, was, in some ways, connected with the establishment of social justice and material equality in the future.⁴⁹

Through this modern interpretation of the religious state, Stroeva attempted to define the role of the *da‘wa* in the political life of Alamūt: ‘Striving for material equality, the ordinary Ismailis have maintained through the history of their state, respect for, and faith in their leaders whose lifestyles were not in any way dissimilar to theirs.’⁵⁰ As Stroeva put it regarding the local non-Turkic elite: ‘The Iranian feudals mobilised all

⁴⁶ Liūdmila Stroeva, *Gosudarstvo Ismailitov v Irane v 11–13 vv.* [The Ismaili State in Iran in the 11th–13th Centuries] (Moscow, 1978), p. 219.

⁴⁷ Ibid., pp. 104–136.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 158.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 168.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

their forces against the Ismailis in the life-and-death struggle. In spite of everything, however, the Ismaili state survived for the simple reason that the Ismailis knew what they stood for'.⁵¹ Thus in academic circles the stories of the Assassin legends were replaced by a new scholarly view of the Ismailis and the impact of their doctrines on the development of feudal society and culture, one which gradually began to gain acceptance.⁵² In conclusion Stroeva declared:

In the Ismaili state they demolished the political power of the Saljūqs, ousted the Saljūq administration; a traditional form of governing, hereditary monarchy, was substituted by the rulership of Ḥasan-i Šabbāḥ and his disciples who expressed the interests of the popular masses – the artisans, urban poor and peasants. This was a significant achievement of the rebels.⁵³

Unlike the medieval heresiographers and indeed some modern scholars, Stroeva refrained from attacking Ḥasan-i Šabbāḥ. For Stroeva, Ḥasan-i Šabbāḥ was not a 'shrewd man' with devious schemes and sinister plots, nor did he claim the imamate for himself and his progeny. Rather, she writes, 'on its dogmatic level *al-da'wa al-jadīda* was no different from *al-da'wa al-qadīma* [the old preaching]. Ḥasan-i Šabbāḥ did not proclaim himself imam, but preached in the name of the imam.'⁵⁴ Stroeva, nonetheless, tended to see *al-da'wa al-jadīda* as a deviation from *al-da'wa al-qadīma* brought about by social factors. The circumstances that led to the split of the Ismailis into Mustā'li and Nizārī branches, she contended, were identical to those entailing the formation of similar groups. As was always the case, this schism is explained in terms of controversies about the person of the imam. Thus, her understanding of the split following the death of the Imam-caliph al-Mustaṣir bi'llāh (d. 487/1094) is not watertight and her claim that Ḥasan-i Šabbāḥ was dissatisfied with *al-da'wa al-qadīma* is not substantiated.

On the whole, and in contrast to some of her colleagues, Stroeva took a balanced approach to the treatment of Ismaili history. It is unfortunate that her contemporaries in Soviet academia often showed an outright hostility to the Ismailis. Thus, the academician Bogoutdinov, while

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 170.

⁵² Ibid., p. 168.

⁵³ Ibid., p. 108.

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 107.

‘defending’ Rūdakī, ‘implicated’, as he put it, for his explicit ties with the Ismailis at the Sāmānid court, writes, ‘However, it is more likely that Rūdakī sometimes articulated the political orders of aristocratic circles connected with the Fatimids in his poetry. . . Moreover, even many “leftist” Ismaili preachers of the 4th/10th century were known for their religious fanaticism.’⁵⁵ Likewise, a Soviet historian of philosophy, A.K. Zakuev, who wrote on the doctrinal affinity of the Ikhwān al-Ṣafā’ and the Ismailis, concluded that ‘undoubtedly, there are many similarities between the teachings and methods of the Ikhwān al-Ṣafā’ and the Ismailis. Nevertheless, the peaceful, liberal and humanistic teaching of Ikhwān al-Ṣafā’, which propagates love, equality and good disposition towards other people, is, in its essence, at odds with the aggressive intolerant views of the Ismailis.’⁵⁶

Another important figure in the field of Ismaili studies was Lidiā Semēnova (1925–2005). One of her works, *Iz Istorii Fatimidskogo Egipta* (On the History of the Fatimids in Egypt), covers the period from the second half of the 4th/10th century to the first half of the 6th/12th century when the Ismaili imams were ruling over a great empire. Written from a Marxist perspective, it interprets the Ismaili movement in terms of a ‘class struggle’ in which the Fatimids promised social justice for those people who had become disappointed with the Abbasids. The Fatimid empire in Egypt is characterised as a feudal state, with a very high level of development in agriculture, crafts and trade. However, according to Lidiā Semēnova ‘. . .excessive centralisation over time began to have a negative impact on the life of the country’,⁵⁷ while the ‘strengthening the power of the military class and the intensification of the struggle within the army, and the weakening of the Ismaili religious hierarchy. . .’⁵⁸ ultimately led to the disintegration of the empire. In spite of the fact that the book was written in the spirit of Marxist ideology, it displays a scholarly standard in examining and analysing historical sources without preconceptions or doctrinal biases.

⁵⁵ A.M. Bogoutdinov, *Ocherki po istorii tadzhikskoi filosofii* [Essays on the History of Tajik Philosophy] (Dushanbe, 1961), p. 58.

⁵⁶ A.K. Zakuev, *Filosofiā ‘Brat’ev chistoty’* [Philosophy of the ‘Brethren of Purity’] (Baku, 1961), p. 8.

⁵⁷ Lidiā Semēnova, *Iz istorii Fatimidskogo Egipta. Ocherki i materialy* [On the History of the Fatimids in Egypt. Essays and Sources] (Moscow, 1974), p. 152.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

The Ismailis in Soviet Badakhshān were also studied in terms of ethnography, cultural anthropology, modern history and politics. Lidiia Fedorovna Monogorova's (1921–2011) ethnographic survey contains references to Ismailism in the Pamirs. Her outline of its origins is a slightly modified version of the orientalist definition common at the time:

Ismailism, rooted in the divination of 'Alī, the son-in-law of the Prophet Muhammad, is one of the two major ramifications in the Shi'i branch of Islam. The emergence of the denomination in the middle of 2nd/8th century is believed to have been connected to a dispute over the right to succession to the imamate after the sixth Shi'i Imam Ja'far al-Ṣādiq, who allegedly deprived his elder son Ismā'il of hereditary rights. Some of Ja'far's followers, however, did not accept his decision and declared Ismā'il the rightful seventh imam, and thereafter the Ismaili sectarians defected.⁵⁹

However, Monogorova, similar to many of her colleagues of the Soviet era, instantly finds a social explanation for a religio-political development:

The denial of Ismā'il's right to the succession was a pretext for the formation of the new sect, as the genuine reason behind the split was 'the struggle between feudalism' and incipient capitalist relations, especially [since] many Ismaili followers were among the wealthy and educated classes of the urban and provincial bourgeoisie . . . the propagators of Ismailism penetrated far into the depths of the lower social level.⁶⁰

Monogorova further argued that the Ismailis in the Western Pamirs, who regard Nāṣir-i Khusraw as the first propagator of the Ismaili *da'wa* there, were different from their fellow Muslims.⁶¹ In her view, which is in line with Marxism, the Ismaili system was formed under the influence of the Indo-Iranian and Zoroastrian religious perspectives on Islam and, therefore, it had a deep impact, particularly because the population of Pamiri lands adopted the Ismaili faith while they were still in a patriarchal and feudal stage of development, maintaining their ancient animistic beliefs.⁶²

There are a few studies that have argued that Soviet and post-Soviet scholarship has referred back to the pre-Islamic era to explain rituals and

⁵⁹ L.F. Monogorova, *Preobrazovaniia v bytu i kul'ture pripamirskikh narodnostei* [Transformations in the Life and Culture of the Pamiri Nationalities] (Moscow, 1972), p. 63.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid., pp. 63–64.

traditions that they felt did not readily fit with Islam. One such is Daniel Beben's PhD thesis, in which he said that 'Soviet and post-Soviet scholarship on the Badakhshāni Ismā'īlī tradition has often invoked a supposed Zoroastrian past as a means of explaining the presence of pre-Islamic "survivals" in the beliefs and practices of Ismā'īlīs, particularly observances that were perceived as reflecting a veneration of light or fire'.⁶³ However, this is a somewhat generalised statement with regard to Soviet and post-Soviet scholarship and the significance of 'a supposed Zoroastrian past' for Soviet and post-Soviet scholars deserves some investigation. What is more, Soviet and post-Soviet scholars and archaeologists were among the first to provide detailed information on Buddhist castles and temples in the Wakhān region.⁶⁴ And indeed, before the studies of Soviet scholars, it was Western Europeans visiting the region who made claims about the survival of Zoroastrian beliefs and traditions in Badakhshān, which were reiterated later by Western scholars during the Soviet and then the post-Soviet periods.⁶⁵ Soviet scholars, working under an official stance of atheism, naturally adopted a neutral approach to the question of the pre-Islamic

⁶³ Beben, *The Legendary Biographies*, p. 48.

⁶⁴ B. Ghafurov, *Tadjiki. Drevneishaia, drevnaia i srednevekovaia istoriia* [The Tajiks. Earliest, Ancient and Medieval History], *Kniga pervaiia* [Book One] (Dushanbe, 1989), pp. 188–191, 214–217; Aktam Babaev, *Kreposti Drevnego Wakhana* [Fortresses of Ancient Wakhān] (Dushanbe, 1973); M.A. Bubnova, *Gorno-Badakhshanskaia Avtonomnaia Oblast' Zapadnyi Pamir (pamiatniki II tys. do n. é. – XIX v.)* [Gorno-Badakhshān Autonomous Region of Western Pamir (monuments of the 2nd millennium BC – xix c.)] (Dushanbe, 1997). Abdulmamad Iloliev, 'The Silk Road castles and temples: ancient Wakhan in legends and history', in Dagikhudo Dagiev and Carole Faucher ed., *Identity, History and Trans-Nationality in Central Asia: The Mountain Communities of Pamir* (London, 2018), pp. 91–105.

⁶⁵ 'The Oxus valley having been the cradle of the religion of Zoroaster, the valleys south of the Hindoo Koosh are not likely to have escaped its influence. In Wakhan there are many towers and structures which are still ascribed to the worshippers of fire, and the tradition of this worship still lingers in Yassin. The secluded easily defensible valleys of Yassin and Gilgit are so eminently suited to afford shelter from persecution of the followers of a dying faith, that fire-worship probably existed in them long after it had been driven out of neighbouring, more accessible, valleys'. John Biddulph, *Tribes of the Hindoo Khoosh* (Calcutta: office of the superintendent of government printing, 1880), p. 108. See also, Ole Olusen, *Through the Unknown Pamirs; the Second Danish Pamir Expedition, 1899–99* (London: William Heinemann, 1904). 'Then all evidence of Zoroastrian communities disappears from Central Asia, except in the Pamirs and Badakhshān where in the 7th/13th century some people still claimed to follow the teachings of Zoroaster.' D.A. Scott,

faith of the Badakhshānīs, including whether it was Zoroastrianism or Buddhism, as well as the possible survival of pre-Islamic rituals. There is no doubt that Buddhism also existed in some parts of Badakhshān, in particular along the routes of the Silk Road, one such being the Wakhān corridor.⁶⁶ Similarly Zoroastrianism was a dominant religion and tradition for thousands of years, such that many of its traditions survived including specific features of the Nawruz (Persian New Year) celebrations and of Pamiri houses, graveyards, burial rites and customs, as well as Avestan toponyms.⁶⁷ Most importantly the recent discovery of the ancient city of Karān, including the Fire Temple there, has provided more evidence to support the theory that the Darvās district of Badakhshān of Afghanistan, which lies on the border with Tajikistan, and which was the southern periphery of ancient Bactria, was most probably the birthplace of Zoroaster.⁶⁸ Similarly, many Fire Temples have been discovered in Badakhshān of Tajikistan, Afghanistan, the Northern Areas of Pakistan and, most recently, in the Chinese part of Badakhshān.⁶⁹

‘Zoroastrian Traces along the Upper Amu Darya (Oxus)’, *The Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland*, 2 (1984), pp. 217–228; ‘Expatriate Sogdians at Dunhuang in China are known to have maintained Zoroastrian ceremonies until at least the beginning of the 10th century’, Frantz Grenet and Zhang Guangda, ‘The Last Refuge of the Sogdian Religion: Dunhuang in the Ninth and Tenth Centuries’, *Bulletin of the Asia Institute*, 10 (1996 [1998]), pp. 175–198; Frantz Grenet, ‘Zoroastrianism in Central Asia’, in Michael Stausberg et al., ed., *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Zoroastrianism* (Chichester, 2015), pp. 129–147. Also, Wu Xin, ‘Zoroastrians of Central Asia: evidence from the Archeology of Art’, *FEZANA Journal* (Summer 2014), pp. 22–30.

⁶⁶ Hyech’o noted on their religion that ‘The king, the chiefs, and the common people all serve Buddha and do not belong to any other religions.’ Further he provided a brief description of the religion of Shughnān to the north explicitly saying that Buddhism was not observed there. Hyech’o, *The Hye Ch’o Diary: Memoir of the Pilgrimage to the Five Regions of India*, ed. and tr. Han-Sung Yang and Yün-Hua Jan (Berkeley, CA: Asian Humanities Press, 1984), p. 52. See, Beben, *The Legendary Biographies*, p. 51.

⁶⁷ Yusufsho Yaqubov, *Davlati Kaëniën* [The Kayyanian State] (Dushanbe, 2012); Abusaid Shokhumorov, *Pamir – Strana Ariei* [Pamir: Land of the Aryan people] (Dushanbe, 1997).

⁶⁸ Yusufsho Yaqubov and Dagikhudo Dagiev, ‘A Badakhshāni origin for Zoroaster’, in Dagikhudo Dagiev and Carole Faucher, ed., *Identity, History and Trans-Nationality in Central Asia*, pp. 79–90.

⁶⁹ Zoroastrian Cemetery found in Xinjiang, Tashkurgan Tajik Autonomous County, Jirzankal, 2013. Available online at http://www.kaogu.cn/en/News/New_discoveries/2013/1026/43277.html [Last accessed, 18 October 2020]. For more details see, Shokhumorov, *Pamir – Strana Ariei*, pp. 71–74.

Meanwhile, a review of the Soviet literature in Ismaili studies appears rather confusing, as on the one hand there were scholars who somehow undermined Ismaili teachings and doctrines, and on the other hand, there were a number of other scholars who were open-minded in their attempt to understand the nature of Ismailism. Clear examples of this would be quotations from two Tajik scholars, which reflect their scholarship. A quotation from Lutfullo Buzurg-zoda (1909–1943) is a good example to illustrate the case in point:

The situation in Egypt in that period [i.e. under the reign of the Fatimids] is characterised, to a great extent, by a highly centralised state machinery and a higher degree of *adāb* in the state administration. Manufacture and commerce flourished there and more religious tolerance was observed for perfectly explicable mundane reasons, namely religious tolerance was conducive to commercial and diplomatic relations with non-Muslim states.⁷⁰

Buzurg-zoda also presented a progressive view of the conversion to Ismailism of Nāṣir-i Khusraw which he considered had two purposes: on the one hand it led to the formation of a great *dā'ir* of the Ismaili faith, but on the other it was part of his mission to fight against the oppression of his people in Khurāsān at the hand of foreign rulers.⁷¹

Equally, another Tajik scholar, Kamol Aynī (1928–2010), discussed the tragedy and crisis faced by Nāṣir in his life and saw his acceptance of Ismailism as the only possible way to fight feudalism and the ideology of 'orthodox' Islam.⁷² For these reasons, the way Nāṣir-i Khusraw courageously confronted the trials of his life was an important factor in his popularity with his contemporaries and in particular with the later generations who admired and respected his bravery, his compassion and his love for Khurāsān that included, of course, its people and his mother tongue:

من انعم که در پیے خوکان بزم
مران میستے در لفظ داری را

⁷⁰ Lutfullo Buzurg-zoda, *Iskatel' pravdy i spravedlivosti Nosir Khisroy* [Nāṣir-i Khusraw, Seeker of Truth and Justice] (Stalinabad, 1953), p. 9.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

⁷² Kamol Aynī, ed. and intr., *Nosiri Khusrav. Gulchine az devoni ashor* [Nāṣir-i Khusraw. Selected Poems from *Dīvān*] (Stalinabad, 1957).

I am he who does not throw before swine

These precious pearls of the Persian language⁷³

(Nāṣir-i Khusraw, *Dīvān*, 64:32)

In the Soviet era some of these scholars had to make a choice between either conforming to Communist ideology, or attempting to follow purely academic lines of examination, which involved compromise and manoeuvring between state ideology and academic objectivity. Apart from the Marxist element in Soviet works, other factors should also be considered while reviewing the literature on the Ismailis by Russian and Soviet scholars. Some scholars, perhaps understandably since the written source material was limited, were influenced by the medieval Sunni sources, as has been discussed. Still others, evidently driven by a belief in Communist ideology, carried out their studies in the service of the Communist Party with the expectation of achieving promotion for their ideologically-sound writings.

Manuscripts Discovered in Badakhshān

An important work written in Badakhshān is *Silk-i gawhar-rīz*, which was found in the GBAO during the 1959–1963 field expedition organised by the Academy of Sciences of the USSR and the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Tajikistan. The work was significant for identifying the genealogy of the Ismaili imams and the religious hierarchy of the *pīrs* of Badakhshān. In contrast to previous texts found in Badakhshān, it is not about theology or philosophy, but is mainly concerned with history and, therefore, represents a source of reference for the study of the history and the genealogy of the *pīrs* as well as the Ismaili imams. Initially, it was assumed to be only about Nāṣir-i Khusraw's journey to Badakhshān. Some local people even believed that it was an eastward continuation of his *Safar-nāma* and therefore referred to it as *Safar-nāma-yi mashriq*, assuming that the original text had disappeared. However, textual study has verified that these assumptions were wrong.⁷⁴

Silk-i gawhar-rīz was written in the first half of the 13th/19th century in Badakhshān in present-day Afghanistan, by a local author named

⁷³ Nāṣir-i Khusraw. *Dīvān*, ed. M. Mīnuvī, and M. Muḥaqqiq (Tehran, 1388 Sh./2009), p. 143.

⁷⁴ Èl'chibekov, *Ierarkhiia Dukhovenstva*, p. 7.

Gawhar-rīz, son of Khwāja ‘Abd al-Nabī, son of Ṣālīḥ-i Yamgī. He considered himself to be a descendant of Sayyid Khwāja Suhrāb Valī Badakhshānī (d. after 856/1452), who was erroneously assumed to be a companion of Nāṣir-i Khusraw. The book has been portrayed as an intellectual and social history of the Ismailis, and similar to many other works about religion, analyses the concepts of ancient religious beliefs, nature, society and the perception of the Badakhshānī Ismailis regarding their own belief system. As mentioned earlier, there is no specific work that deals with the Ismaili hierarchy although the *Sīlk-i gawhar-rīz* is a very significant source in this context due to the details it provides on this subject. Even though a few anonymous Ismaili sources such as: *Bāb dar bāyn-i dānistān-i ‘ālam-i dīn*, *Risāla dar bāb-i haft ḥudūd al-dīn* and *Dawāzdah faṣl* provide some information about the Ismaili hierarchy, none of them is as detailed as *Sīlk-i gawhar-rīz*. However *Sīlk-i gawhar-rīz*, like some of the other manuscripts discovered, contains misreadings and misunderstandings of historical events particularly regarding Ismaili history, as the ‘author does not provide sources for his information’ and ‘invokes Nāṣir-i Khusraw throughout the text, [but] narratives about him are scarce’.⁷⁵

There are three copies of the *Sīlk-i gawhar-rīz*; one is listed in the Alphabetical Catalogue of the Manuscripts collected by Andrei Bertel’s and Muhammadvafo Bakaev.⁷⁶ It is preserved as MS number 195 in the collection of the Institute of Oriental Studies, Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Tajikistan. The second manuscript was found by a learned man in Khārūgh, the administrative centre of the GBAO, in 1970. Since the first manuscript was found in the Rūshān district, it was listed under the letter ‘R’, and the second manuscript from the Shughnān district is listed under the letter ‘S’. Following the study of both manuscripts, it appears that manuscript ‘S’ is the more complete and accurate one.⁷⁷ A third copy is an uncatalogued manuscript held in Semēnov archive in the Institute of History, Archaeology and Ethnography of the Academy of Sciences of Tajikistan.⁷⁸

⁷⁵ Gulamadov, *The Hagiography of Nāṣir-i Khusraw*, p. 242; Iloliev, *The Ismā‘īlī-Sufi Sage of Pamir*, p. 33.

⁷⁶ A.E. Bertel’s and M. Bakaev, *Alfavitnyi katalog rukopisei* [Alphabetical Catalogue of Manuscripts], pp. 85–86.

⁷⁷ Èl’chibekov, *Ierarkhiia Dukhovenstva*, p. 60.

⁷⁸ Ibid.; Beben, *The Legendary Biographies*, p. 346.

Silk-i gawhar-rīz was written in 1224 *hijrī* (1828–1829) in the Jurm district of Badakhshān and as verses in the book reveal, the author was sixty when he wrote it:

عمر زیم چو پند و نصیبت بارگه قامت بار شکست

My precious life has reached sixty
The load of guilt has broken my back

Although the author gives his name as Gawhar-rīz, this seems to be his nickname. He was the son of Khwāja ‘Abd al-Nabī b. Khwāja Ṣāliḥ-i Yamgī, and was born around 1181–82/1768–69 (there is no reference to his place of birth).

The ‘S’ copy of the manuscript, consisting of 113 folios, was copied in a very beautiful *nasta‘līq* style by the renowned Ismaili *pīr* Sayyid Shāhzāda Muḥammad b. Sayyid Farrukh Shāh in 1337/1918 (in the village of Sarā-yi Bahār, Pārshinev district) at the request of an influential local figure of the time, Sayyid Mursal (first half of the 20th century), as indicated in the colophon. The ‘R’ copy, found and collected by the Bertel’s and Bakoev expedition in the district of Rūshān in 1381/1961,⁷⁹ is a complete text copied in *nasta‘līq mutawassiṭ*. It contains many grammatical mistakes, which are quite commonly found in texts copied by the local people.⁸⁰ The work is only known of in Badakhshān, and Wladimir Ivanow noted that he ‘failed to find the manuscript even though he made a great effort to do so’.⁸¹

The book consists of two parts: poetry and prose. It begins with the conventional practice of talking about the creation of the world and a discussion of Ismaili philosophy of the medieval era. It further argues that the concepts in Ismaili philosophy, which was based a combination of Neoplatonic teaching and interpretation of Qur’anic verses, originated among Ismaili thinkers in Egypt in the 4th–5th/10th–11th centuries and

⁷⁹ A.E. Bertel’s and M. Bakaev, *Alfavitnyi rukopisei*, pp. 238–239.

⁸⁰ Author’s interview with Qudratbek Ėl’chibekov, Senior Research Associate at the Oriental Institute of Manuscript Studies Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Tajikistan (Dushanbe, 2015).

⁸¹ A.E. Bertel’s and M. Bakaev, *Alfavitnyi rukopisei*, p. 88.

later spread over the present territories of Iran and Central Asia. However, as already stated here, the latest studies have established that Ismaili teachings were infused with Neoplatonic philosophy in Khurāsān by Persian Ismaili thinkers.⁸²

The author of *Sīlk-i gawhar-rīz* continues with this Ismaili philosophical understanding regarding the creation of the universe, beginning with the *'aql-i kull* (the Universal Intellect), *nafs-i kull* (the Universal Soul) and *chahār 'anāšir* (the four elements), in line with Nāṣir-i Khusraw's religio-philosophical understanding of the world.⁸³ The historical part of the book is important for scholars studying the Ismailis of Badakhshān, as it attempts to outline a historical narrative about the spread of Ismailism at the time of Nāṣir, as well as providing accounts of the activities of *dā'īs* and other religious authorities who followed Nāṣir's tradition. However, as already

Hājat va Munājāt-i Mubārak-i Wakhānī

⁸² For further information in this regard see, pp. 9–10, 12.

⁸³ Kudratbek Ėl'chibekov, 'Istoricheskie istochniki v Badakhshane' [Historical Sources in Badakhshān], *IAN (TSSR)*, 1 (1975), pp. 27–31.

mentioned, an examination of the text has demonstrated that *Silk-i gawhar-rīz* cannot be a reliable source as a narrative of the history of the Ismailis of Central Asia. In the historical part, the author mentions Nāṣir-i Khusraw meeting the Imam of the time, al-Mustanṣir bi'llāh, and receiving the title of *ḥujja* of Khurāsān, which is not found in any Fatimid historical sources.⁸⁴ However, E. Bertel's assumed that these details are not given in Nāṣir's *Safar-nāma* because the original copy of the *Safar-nāma* was probably lost.⁸⁵

The book provides information about religious leaders in Badakhshān such as Sayyid Suhrāb Valī and Bābā 'Umar-i Yamgī who were regarded as disciples of Nāṣir-i Khusraw, although Suhrāb Valī lived in the 9th/15th century and 'has nothing to do with Nāṣir-i Khusraw and does not even belong to his school, but coincides with the Alamūt tradition'.⁸⁶ But it also presents a detailed account of the Ismaili hierarchy and the ranks of *imām*, *ḥujja*, *dā'ī*, *ma'dhūn-i akbar*, *ma'dhūn-i asghar*, *mu'allim*, *mustajīb*. A significant part is devoted to the Nizārī imams, the activities of the *dā'īs* and the rulers of Badakhshān from Nāṣir-i Khusraw's time until that of the author. Although earlier works have been written about the history of Badakhshān, none of them provides such a broad, comprehensive study of the Ismailis and of the activities of the *dā'wa* in Badakhshān.

As mentioned earlier, the basis for understanding the culture and tradition of the indigenous people of the mountain region of Badakhshān was established through the study of Ismailism by Russian scholars. I.I. Zarubin (1887–1964), was one of the first to visit Shughnān in 1916 and collected eleven manuscripts amongst which were: *Umm al-kitāb*, *Wajh-i dīn*, *Haft bāb*, *Sih faṣl-i 'Aṭṭār*, *Divān-i Shams-i Tabrīzī*, *Markaz al-adwār-i Fāyḍ-i Dakkanī*, *Zilzila-nāma*, *Ḥikāyat-i qahqaha*, *Sa'adat-nāma* and *Mir'at al-Muḥaqqiqīn*.⁸⁷ These, together with some other materials with

⁸⁴ 'It is interesting to note that Khurāsān, of which Nāṣir-i Khusraw claimed to be the *ḥujja* in the second half of the 5th/11th century, does not appear as a *jazīra* in al-Nu'mān's list'. Daftary, *The Ismā'īlīs* (2nd ed., Cambridge, 2007), p. 218.

⁸⁵ E. Bertel's assumed that the present text of the *Safar-nāma* is incomplete and that the original version has not come down to us. 'The present copy of the *Safar-nāma* is incomplete and has been much distorted, as one can see in several places the narrative is in the third person.' Bertel's, preface to his translation of *Nasir-i Khusraw: Safar-nāma* (Moscow–Leningrad, 1933).

⁸⁶ Wladimir Ivanow, *A Guide to Ismaili Literature* (London, 1933), p. 93. See, Iloliev, *The Ismā'īlī-Sufi Sage of Pamir*, p. 34.

⁸⁷ Wladimir Ivanow, 'Ismailitskie rukopisi Aziatskogo Muzeia', *Sobranie I. Zarubina*, 1916 g.' [Ismaili Manuscripts of the Asiatic Museum. I. Zarubin's Collection, 1916], *Izvestiia Rossiiskoi Akademii Nauk*, 6 série, 11 (1917), pp. 359–386.

Ivan Ivanovich Zarubin (1887–1964)

Sufi and Ismaili contents acquired from the local people, were eventually moved to the Asiatic Museum in St Petersburg where they are still preserved at the Institute of Oriental Manuscripts.

However, these pioneering Russian scholars were only able to collect manuscripts that were known amongst the larger portion of the community and hence generally accessible.

A few years later Semënov also collected eight more manuscripts, which are also held by the Asiatic Museum. Yet many more manuscripts and related literature on poetry, philosophy, history and religious matters were still held and preserved by local people, particularly in remote rural areas. Many of these manuscripts only became known and available to scholars during the Soviet period as a result of the several field trips to those regions undertaken by members of the Academy of Sciences of Tajikistan. In 1967, Andreï Bertel's and Muhammadvafo Bakaev compiled a list of the manuscripts found in the region of Gorno-Badakhshān. Their work is regarded as one of the most important manuscript studies for this region. During the five years of fieldwork (1959–1963) it undertook, the academic expedition to the GBAO mentioned earlier examined 117 manuscripts. Palaeographic descriptions were prepared, and the manuscripts were photographed and then returned to their owners. The

present catalogue has been compiled from photostat copies from the photographs and the diaries that were the result of the expedition. This material is now kept at the Department of Oriental Studies in Dushanbe. The collection described in the present catalogue consists of 186 works. At least 30 manuscripts have been ascertained to be completely new findings.

The manuscripts found as a result of these field trips have contributed towards a better understanding of the spread of Ismailism in the region from the 4th/10th century up to the present time. One of the oldest manuscripts is a copy of the *Rasā'il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'* and the most recent is a collection of poetry by poets such as Nazmī, Maḥmūd, Ghiyāthī, Fārighī, Mīrzā 'Ibādī Shidzī, Shāh Fitūr and many other Badakhshānī poets of the 12th/18th and 13th/19th centuries, a collection which clearly reflects the life and religious activities of the Ismaili community at that particular period of time. One popular book was the *Ẓafar-nāma*, whose original text, according to Hājī Khalīfa, was translated by Ibn Sīnā (370–428/980–1037) for Nūḥ b. Maṣṣūr Sāmānī (r. 366–387/977–997). Other works discovered include the *Pand-nāma* of Shaykh Farīd al-Dīn 'Aṭṭār (Persian poet, Sufi theoretician of mysticism, and hagiographer,

Kulliyat-i Mubārak-i Wakhānī

540–618/1145–1221) and the *Ṣad naṣīḥat* of Luqmān al-Ḥakīm.⁸⁸ In the Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Tajikistan there is a special section for the Ismaili manuscript collections which were discovered during the five years of fieldwork in Badakhshān, including the *Zubdat al-ḥaqāʾiq* and *Kashf al-ḥaqāʾiq* of ʿAzīz al-Dīn Nasafī (a famous Persian Sufi scholar and author of the 7th/13th century), *Uṣūl al-ādāb* and *Āfāq-nāma* (attributed to Nāṣir-i Khusraw), and the anonymous work, *Umm al-kitāb*. It was thought that *Umm al-kitāb* was written by Nāṣir-i Khusraw, or the Persian polymath and Ismaili scholar, Naṣīr al-Dīn Ṭūsī (597–672/1201–1274). However, the original of the *Umm al-kitāb* is thought to have been produced in Arabic in the early Shiʿi *ghulāt* groups of southern Iraq in the second half of the 2nd/8th century, and then translated in the early decades of the 6th/12th century into Persian and expanded by the Persian Nizārī Ismailis.⁸⁹

Several copies of the manuscript were discovered by Russian Orientalists among the collections of the Nizārī Ismailis of Badakhshān. Even though the text does not contain any known Ismailis doctrines, still the Central Asian Ismailis regard it as one of their most sacred and secret works. Ivanow was one of the first Orientalists to introduce the *Umm al-kitāb* to the scholarly world and in 1936 published a critical edition of it.⁹⁰

Along with these materials discovered as a result of the fieldwork, there are also collections of folklore literature produced by local poets and writers, such as *Qiṣṣa-yi Chihil-tanān*, *Jang-nāma-yi Amīr-i Sīstān*, *Dāstān-i dukhtar-i Shaykh Maṣṣūr-i Hallāj* and other works. Moreover, amongst the materials collected there is also a pseudo-biography of Nāṣir-i Khusraw, *Dar nadāmat-i rūz-i qiyāmat*, and Ḥasan-i Ṣabbāḥ's *Haft Bāb* or *Qiṣṣa-yi Sargudhasht-i Bābā Sayyidnā*, still both very popular with the people of Badakhshān.

The majority of these collections consists of works by local poets, which bring to the fore the popularity of, and admiration for, poetry and the Persian poetic tradition, among the Badakhshānī Ismailis. The main

⁸⁸ Sometimes considered to be the Aesop of Arabic literature, wise sayings and epithets have been attributed to this pre-Islamic poet who is mentioned in Q. 31:23: 'We bestowed wisdom on Luqmān'.

⁸⁹ Daftary, *The Ismāʿīlīs* (2nd ed., Cambridge, 2007), pp. 93–95.

⁹⁰ For a comprehensive discussion of this work, see, Farhad Daftary, 'Omm al-kitāb', *EIR*. Available online at: <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/omm-al-kitab> [Last accessed, 15 June 2020].

sources of poetic inspiration were the beauty of nature, love of God and his creation, the relationship between the Prophet and the *ahl al-bayt* (the Prophet's immediate family), philosophy and the ethical aspects of human life. Also, the influence of the great and respected poet, Nāṣir-i Khusraw, is supreme among the poets and poetic traditions of Badakhshān, with most local poets having followed his style when composing their works. However, the literature of the local poets of Badakhshān has not been properly studied as yet. Well-known local poets include Mubārak-i Wakhānī (d. 1903), Shāh Fitūr, Mullā Timī, Shamshebek, to mention but a few. Besides being a respected poet, Mubārak-i Wakhānī also produced a scholarly work on philosophy and astrology.⁹¹ The emergence of these manuscripts highlights the fact that the people living in the high mountains of the Pamirs were well aware of Persian classical literature, such as the works of Aḥmad-i Jāmī (d. 536/1141), Shaykh 'Aṭṭār (d. 618/1220), Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī (d. 672/1273), Sa'dī Shīrāzī (d. 691/1291), Maḥmūd Shabistari (d. after 740/1339), Bābā Farghānī (d. 749/1348), Ḥāfiz Shīrāzī (d. 792–1390).

The second part of these literary finds consists of a collection of historical sources written in Badakhshān. One of the first historical works identified as *Tārīkh-i Badakhshān* (The History of Badakhshān) was written by local author, Muḥammad Ḥusayn, in the first half of the 12th/18th century. However, it seems that this work has not survived. The second local history which includes a detailed historical work concerning the political and social history of Badakhshān by Mīrzā Sang Muḥammad Badakhshī (12th–13th/18th–19th centuries) and a history by Faḍl 'Alī Bek Surkhafsar (13th–14th/19th–20th centuries) is also entitled *Tārīkh-i Badakhshān*.⁹² *Tārīkh-i Badakhshān* consists of these two parts; the first part is the history of Badakhshān compiled by Mīrzā Sang Muḥammad Badakhshī in 1223/1808, and the second part belongs to Faḍl 'Alī Bek Surkhafsar completed in 1325/1907, which also includes three appendices, and covers the events of 1905 [1657–58] in the territories of the present-day Tajikistan and northern Afghanistan. It reflects the bloody inter-tribal clashes in Rāgh, Shughnān, Khatlān, Chitrāl and Fayḍābād provinces of Afghanistan. Individual chapters are devoted to the history of the dynasties of the *amīrs* and *khāns* of Badakhshān from the Tajiks, Uzbeks,

⁹¹ For more details see, Iloliev, *The Ismā'īlī-Sufī Sage of Pamir*.

⁹² Mirzo Sangmuhammadi Badakhshī and Mirzo Fazlalibeki Surkhafsar, *Tārīkh-i Badakhshon* [The History of Badakhshān] (Dushanbe, 2007).

Qaṭaghans, Qārluqs and Qalmūqs, the intervention of Tsarist Russia and the British empire in the region, and their division of Badakhshān. The book provides a genealogy of a range of the *shāhs* and *mīrs* of Shughnān, including a biography of Sayyid Shāh Khāmūsh and a genealogy of Sayyid ‘Alī Shāh Valī, the father-in-law of Shāh Khāmūsh.

Another source also entitled *Tārīkh-i Badakhshān* was written by Qurbān Muḥammadzāda Ākhūnd Sulaymān and Shāh Fitūr Muḥammad Shāhzāda.⁹³ The work was edited and published by a Tajik historian from Badakhshān, Bahodur Iskandarov, in 1973. This work is designated by the same title as the two previous ones, however it mainly describes and narrates the local oral tradition of Shughnān, and how it has been preserved and passed from generation to generation, and would probably have been more appropriately called a history of Shughnān rather than of Badakhshān. However, it does refer to events in the history of Badakhshān as well. It also recounts the arrival of the three brothers from Mashhad, Shāh Malang, Shāh Khāmūsh and Shāh Burhān. The work is divided into four parts: 1) the reign of a local ruler ‘Abd al-Raḥīm Khān the son of Qubād Khān (ca. 1207–1230/1792–1814); 2) a history of the local kings of Shughnān; 3) *Tārīkh-i Afghānistān*, which deals with the occupation of Badakhshān by the Afghans; and 4) the time of Tsar Nicholas II (r. 1894–1917) and the arrival of Russian soldiers in Badakhshān up to the October Revolution in 1917.

The *Qayd-hā-yi tārīkhī* was written by Qurbān Shāh Zuhūr Bekzāda and describes historical events in Badakhshān from 1274/1858 to 1920 and the hardships of life under the rule of the Afghan *amīr* ‘Abd al-Raḥīm Khān (r. 1845–1867), and his sons Muḥabbat Khān (r. 1867–1868) and Yūsuf ‘Alī Khān (1869–1874), the rulers of Shughnān and Rūshān. This work and Sayyid Ḥaydar Shāh Mubārak Shāhzāda’s *Tārīkh-i Mulk-i Shughnān* contain some detailed discussions on the history of Shughnān and its relations with neighbouring areas such as Rūshān, Wakhān and Darvāz.⁹⁴ *Tārīkh-i Mulk-i Shughnān* was written at the request of the Russian scholar Aleksandr Semēnov in 1912, who translated it into Russian four years later. The work begins with the story of Chinese rule in Shughān, but does not provide dates. It also says that the local people

⁹³ In the local pronunciation, known as Kurbon Mukhammadzoda (Okhun-Sulaïmon) and Mukhabbat Shokhzoda (Seid-Fitur-Sho), *Istoriā Badakhshana* [The History of Badakhshān] (Moscow, 1973).

⁹⁴ Muborakshohzoda, *Tārīkh-i Mulk-i Shughnān*.

belonged to different religious confessions including Ismailism, Twelver Shi'ism and idol-worship, and that half of the population were Sunnis. The text also mentions the arrival from Khurāsān of Shāh Khāmūsh and the story of how he overthrew the oppressive fire-worshipping king and establish his own rule. A short manuscript, *Mathnawī-yi Tārīkhī*, which is dedicated to eight local rulers of Shughnān, is another historical source. The *Mathnawī-yi Tārīkhī* also known as the *Tārīkh-i Shāhān-i Shughnān*, is a history of the rulers of Shughnān written in verse which gives a brief survey of the reigns of eight rulers of Shughnān. The author was a local Ismaili *pīr* of Shughnān, Sayyid Farrukh Shāh (d. 1307/1889), the son of Shāh Partāwī.⁹⁵

These discoveries suggest a rich tradition of literature and literacy amongst the inhabitants of Badakhshān. Learned people and poets held a position of respect in the community as well as being highly regarded by the rulers of their time for their knowledge and contributions to learning and scholarship. The appetite for knowledge and learning in the tradition of the Badakhshān Ismaili community can be attributed directly to the teachings of their *pīr*, Nāṣir-i Khusraw, who in his *Wajh-i dīn* lays particular importance on the role of the intellect and learning: '...in reality, the Intellect is Paradise'.⁹⁶ Therefore, the attainment of knowledge was regarded as the highest purpose of a human-being in the material world, being the only means of salvation for the soul.

Even though an analysis of the poetry and religious literature of the Ismaili community shows that they were generally isolated from the outside world in the remote high Pamir mountains, it also proves that they were well aware of the Persian literary tradition and its main themes such as love, beauty, ethics, religion and philosophy. They were also able to maintain their religious traditions and beliefs, passing them down through the generations over centuries despite living in a hostile environment, surrounded by a Sunni majority, and governed by autocratic rulers.

⁹⁵ In the 18th and 19th centuries, local scholars produced a number of historical works. For more details see, Kudratbek Ēl'chibekov, 'Novye materialy po istorii Shughnana' [New Materials on the History of Shughnān], *IAN (TSSR)*, 2 (1973), pp. 3–11. Nourmamadchoev, *The Ismā'īlis of Badakhshān*, pp. 2–3.

⁹⁶ Nosiri Khusrawi Qubodīēnī [Nāṣir-i Khusraw-i Qubādiyānī], *Wajhi dīn* [Wajh-i dīn], ed. Aliqul Devonaqulov and Nurmuhammad Amirshohii (Dushanbe, 2002), p. 56.

In the *Tārīkh-i Badakhshān* of Sulaymān Qurbān Muḥammadzāda and Sayyid Shāh Fitūr Muḥabbat Shāhzāda, mentioned above, there is no mention of Nāṣir-i Khusraw's *da'wa* or his teachings but the authors talk extensively about the Ismaili teachings given by four *darvīshes* known as Sayyid Shāh Malang, Mir Sayyid Ḥasan Shāh Khāmūsh, Shāh Kāshān and Shāh Burhān Valī. Nonetheless, the focus is on the socio-political life of Badakhshān, the ruling elite and their genealogies, rather than on religion. By contrast, the author of *Sīlk-i gawhar-rīz*, as is apparent from the text, was a follower of the Nizārī Ismaili *ṭarīqa* who constantly demonstrates his love and passion for Nāṣir-i Khusraw and his followers. Consequently, *Gawhar-rīz* is mainly concerned with Ismaili religious beliefs and practices, Nāṣir-i Khusraw, the religious hierarchy, and the influential *pīrs* and *dā'īs* who played an important role in the spread of Ismaili teachings in the region.

Despite the essential shortcomings of Soviet studies, as a result of the all-pervasive influence of Marxism and the Communist Party's authoritarian rule, Soviet scholars in fact produced many positive insights in the field of Ismaili studies. They examined almost every aspect of the life of the Ismaili community using disciplines from anthropology to archaeology, ethnography, history, philosophy, ritual practice and most importantly the collection and preservation of Ismaili manuscripts. Most of the photostat reproductions of these manuscripts are held at the Rudaki Institute of Oriental Studies and Written Heritage of the Republic of Tajikistan and the Russian Federation and are now available to scholars and students. However, the sudden collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 and the emergence of the national republics as independent states meant that various projects which were designed to locate manuscripts for future studies were left in tatters. However, since independence developments for the Ismaili community and scholars in Tajikistan have included the establishment of the Ismaili institutions and the AKDN there. Once these institutions were established in Tajikistan, they began collaborating with the Academy of Sciences of Tajikistan and other academic institutions in order to advance the study and preservation of manuscripts. Several projects, which had come to a halt as a result of financial and other difficulties in the newly independent countries, have been restarted.

Review of the Literature on the Ismailis in Post-Soviet Studies

In Soviet and post-Soviet Tajikistan, the Ismailis of Badakhshān, who are like the Yaghnābīs,⁹⁷ also referred to as Pamiris in official Tajik government and academic contexts, are regarded as the ancestors of the present Tajiks. Alongside the Bactrians, Sogdians, Saka and other sedentary peoples of Central Asia – the Pamiris and the Yaghnābīs have contributed to the core elements that formed and developed into contemporary Tajik ethnicity.⁹⁸ Since the Tajik government recognises the Pamiri peoples and the Yaghnābīs as a central part of the Tajik nation, accordingly, their languages are also an integral part of the Tajik common cultural heritage. In other words, they are as much a part of the common national cultural heritage as the official state language, which is Tajik-Farsi. This means that the state should pay the same attention and give as much funding to the development of these languages as it does to the official state language. The Tajik people including Pamiris and other Eastern Iranians by their origin, culture and tradition are part of a common historical heritage,

⁹⁷ ‘Currently, one of the most ancient and smallest groups of people lives in the territory of modern Tajikistan, which it can be also said with confidence is one of the rarest nationalities in the world. From time immemorial, the Yaghnābīs have lived in the high, mountainous and impassable Yagnāb Gorge. Their ancestors are the Sogdians, thus the peoples who have been famous for their high culture since the existence of the Sogdian and Bactrian kingdoms. The inhabitants of Yagnāb, overcoming all the political and historical obstacles that fell to their lot, have managed to preserve and bring to our times their most precious wealth – the Sogdian language, better known today as “Yagnāb” or “new Sogdian”. And here it is important to say that it was precisely due to their geographical location that the Yaghnābīs managed to preserve their language. The Yagnāb gorge is located between the Zarafshān mountain range in the north, and in the south, the Hiṣṣār mountain range. This territory is subordinate to the Ainy district of the Sughd region. The main occupation of the inhabitants of the gorge is agriculture and animal husbandry.’ S. Mirzozoda, ‘Yagnabskiĭ yazyk-bogatstvo tadjhikskogo naroda, kotoroe neobkhodimo peredat’ sleduyushchim pokoleniĭam’ [The Yaghnāb language is the wealth of the Tajik people, which must be passed on to the future generations]. Available online at: <http://sugdnews.com/2017/10/30/mirzozoda-yagnabskij-yazyk-bogatstvo-tadjhikskogo-naroda-kotoroe-neobkhodimo-peredat-sleduyushchim-pokoleniyam-3/> [Last accessed, 29 October 2020].

⁹⁸ Dagikhudo Dagiev, ‘Pamiri Ethnic Identity and Its Evolution in post-Soviet Tajikistan’, in Dagiev and Faucher, ed., *Identity, History and Trans-Nationality in Central Asia*, pp. 23–44, 37.

which requires special attention in terms of its preservation and study. These languages are no longer purely oral. With these languages, people compose poems, write songs and correspond on social networks.⁹⁹ Thus, their development is still on going and is to be considered as an irreversible process; yet, the development and preservation have been done mainly by the people themselves, rather than by state institutions.

The disintegration of the Soviet Union and Tajikistan's 1991 declaration of independence opened up an opportunity for the Ismaili community in Badakhshān and Tajikistan to establish links once again with their imam and with the Imamate institutions worldwide from which they had been completely cut off during the Soviet period. Indeed, this was a significant and historical event for the Ismaili community in Tajikistan as well as for the Imamate institutions around the world. The Imamate institutions under the umbrella of the Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN) began providing assistance for every aspect of the community's life as well as humanitarian aid and support for local institutions in various fields including education. In this instance it was achieved by granting scholarships for students and scholars to carry on with their studies at Russian and Western universities, and providing funding for academic institutions in Tajikistan and other Central Asian states. One such important project was the collaboration with and the continuation of the Soviet scholarly tradition in Ismaili studies.

Since the disintegration of the Soviet Union, local, Russian and Western scholars have continued to work on Ismaili studies, including on the Ismailis of Central Asia. This also includes the publication and translation of many academic works into Russian, Persian and Tajik¹⁰⁰ by the Institute of Ismaili Studies (IIS), in London. The study and understanding of Ismaili beliefs and doctrines are undergoing a dramatic transformation due to increased access to the academic and non-academic literature produced in Western countries. Prior to independence only a very limited number of people had any access to the considerable body of Ismaili literature that has been published by Western scholars over the last several decades. However, thanks to the IIS, much of this material has

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ From the 1930s the Persian language in Soviet Central Asia became known as Tajik. The Arab/Persian script was abandoned and the Latin script adopted in 1929, and in 1940 it was changed again to the Cyrillic script, which is still in use in modern Tajikistan.

been translated into various local languages, including Tajik, enabling access to many people in the community as well as others interested in Ismaili studies. The seminal works by Farhad Daftary, such as *The Ismā'īlīs: Their History and Doctrines*, *The Assassin Legends* and *A Short History of the Ismailis*,¹⁰¹ have been instrumental for both academic and non-academic audiences in the post-Soviet era in understanding Ismaili history and doctrines.¹⁰² Farhad Daftary's works on the study of the history of the Ismailis and their doctrines are clear and comprehensible, but they are mainly focused on the areas that have been either the bases of the Ismaili imams or the focus of *da'wa* activity, such as North Africa, Egypt, Iran and lately India. Generally speaking, Central Asia was viewed as peripheral in this regard and received less scholarly attention in the West.

Nevertheless, in post-Soviet Central Asia, in a fashion similar to that initiated by Russian scholars in the Tsarist era and continued by Soviet scholars under the guidance of the famous Soviet Orientalists, Andreï Bertel's and Mamadvafo Baqoev, a group of orientalist scholars and other academics travelled to the Western Pamirs to identify and digitise

¹⁰¹ Farhad Daftary, *The Ismā'īlīs: their History and Doctrines* (1st ed., Cambridge, 1990; 2nd ed., 2007); *The Assassin Legends: Myths of the Ismā'īlīs* (London, 1994); *A Short History of the Ismailis* (Edinburgh, 1998).

¹⁰² See the list of IIS translations and publications in Russian, Tajik, Chinese and Uyghur:

1. Daftary, Farhad. *A Short History of the Ismailis*, tr. A. Alimardonov (in Tajik).
2. – ed., *Intellectual Traditions in Islam*, tr. M. Dinorshoev (in Tajik).
3. – *A Short History of the Ismailis*, tr. Leila Dodykhudoeva and Lola Dodkhudoeva (in Russian).
4. – *Ismailis in Medieval Muslim Societies*, tr. L. Dodykhudoeva (in Russian).
5. – *The Assassin Legends*, tr. L. Dodykhudoeva (in Russian).
6. – *The Assassin Legends*, tr. A. Mamadnazarov (in Tajik).
7. – *The Ismailis: Their History and Doctrines*, tr. L. Dodykhudoeva (in Russian).
8. – *The Ismailis: Their History and Doctrines*, 2nd ed., tr. A. Mamadnazarov (in Tajik).
9. – *A Short History of the Ismailis*, tr. A. Saidula (in Chinese).
10. – *A Short History of the Ismailis*, tr. A. Saidula (in Uyghur).
11. – ed., *A Modern History of the Ismailis. Continuity and Change in a Muslim Community*, tr. L. Dodykhudoeva (in Russian).
12. – *Historical Dictionary of the Ismailis*, tr. L. Dodykhudoeva (in Russian).
13. – *A History of Shi'ī Islam*, tr. L. Dodykhudoeva (in Russian).
14. Hunsberger, Alice. *The Ruby of Badakhshan*, tr. N. Zurobekov (in Tajik).
15. – *The Ruby of Badakhshan*, tr. L. Dodykhudoeva (in Russian).
16. Lalani, Arzina. *Early Shi'ī Thought*, tr. N. Terletskiy (in Russian).
17. Shah-Kazemi, Reza. *Justice and Remembrance: Introducing the Spirituality of Imam 'Alī*, tr. N. Terletskiy (in Russian).

manuscripts. The IIS launched this project in 1995 in order to identify, preserve and digitise the manuscripts and literary heritage of the Ismailis of Badakhshān in conjunction with the then Ismaili Tariqa and Religious Education Committee (ITREC) in Khārūgh, Tajikistan. In 2013, the Institute of Ismaili Studies established the Ismaili Special Collections Unit (ISCU) that now directs and manages the work of the manuscript project in Khārūgh, Tajikistan (previously managed under different entities in the IIS).

Outline of the Activities and Projects Conducted by the Manuscript Office

Since 1995, the manuscript project in Khārūgh has conducted many field trips in Badakhshān of Tajikistan. As a result, a great deal of material has been collected and periodic reports have been submitted to the IIS. A selected number of reports produced by the team in the Khārūgh Manuscript Office and the ISCU have been used in writing this brief section.¹⁰³

The work of the Khārūgh Manuscript Office can be divided into the following broad categories:

- (i) Identifying manuscripts and other literary sources
- (ii) Preparing working handlists/catalogues
- (iii) Digitising identified manuscripts and other literary sources
- (iv) Analysing the content of identified manuscripts

Identifying and digitising manuscripts and other literary sources in Badakhshān of Tajikistan is still a work in progress. Hence, the Manuscript Project in Khārūgh produces working lists and reports which are used by

¹⁰³ The following reports have been used in writing this section: N. Nourmamdchoev, *Analytical Mapping of Persian Manuscripts from Badakhshan of Tajikistan: Revised version* (November 2019); N. Nourmamdchoev, *Analytical Mapping of Persian Manuscripts from Badakhshan of Afghanistan: Revised version* (November 2019); S. Sherzodshoev, 'Discovery of Documents in Badakhshan of Tajikistan' (Unpublished Report for the IIS, 2016); N. Nourmamadchoev, *Review of the Hand-List of Manuscripts from Badakhshan of Tajikistan* (20 January 2016); S. Sherzodshoev, 'Report from the Khorog Office: Discovery of Historical Documents' (Unpublished Report for the IIS, 2015); S. Mamadsheerzodshoev, 'Excerpt from a report by ISCU Khārūgh Unit' (Unpublished Report for the IIS, 2014).

scholars at the ISCU, IIS, for preparing catalogues of manuscripts found in the broader Badakhshān region. The work the Khārūgh Manuscript Office undertook can be divided into two phases: phase one covered the period from 1995 to 2007 when the project was focused on identifying and digitising manuscripts, archival material and other sources relating to the heritage of the mountain regions of the GBAO of Tajikistan only. The originals are still held in private collections. Phase two covered the period from 2007 to 2016 when the project extended its field trips to include Badakhshān of Afghanistan as well. Unfortunately, the fieldwork in Badakhshān of Afghanistan did not last long due to the political instability, becoming infrequent from the end of 2010 and eventually stopping in 2016. Therefore, the southern parts of Badakhshān of Afghanistan where a small pocket of Ismailis resides remain uncovered by the project.

Even though the fieldwork in Badakhshān of Tajikistan and Afghanistan proved to be difficult because of the harsh climate and the natural environment as well as political instability in these regions, they resulted in the collection of a great deal of material. This was used in the creation of working handlists of various treatises in prose and poetry preserved in the manuscripts that had been discovered, the manuscripts being then digitised.

A working hand-list of manuscripts from Badakhshān of Tajikistan written in the Persian script by Shozodamamad Sherzodshoev and Mamadhusayn Alimadadshoev. This hand-list describes a total of 310 manuscripts which are either single-volume works or collections of treatises, known as a *majmū'as*. These 310 manuscripts contain more than 570 titles of various lengths and genres. Most of the texts are either copied from older manuscripts or from printed/lithographed copies which were not readily available in Badakhshān. A prominent place is given to a small number of manuscripts which are considered unique and were copied between 1049/1648 and 1101/1690.¹⁰⁴

The Ismailis of Badakhshān preserved various copies of collections of poetry, *Dīvāns*, by famous Sufi poets such as Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad Ḥāfiẓ (d. 791/1389) [MS BT 301 and MS BT 308], and Jalāl-al-Dīn Muḥammad Rūmī (d. 672/1273) [MS BT 3; MS BT 13; MS BT 70; MS BT 96, MS BT 97; MS BT 120; MS BT292]. Apart from these *Dīvāns* there is a prevalence of Sufi works generally, such as those of the famous

¹⁰⁴ N. Nourmamdchoev, *Analytical Mapping of Persian Manuscripts from Badakhshan of Tajikistan: Revised version* (November, 2019), p. 9.

5th/11th-century author Abū Ismāʿīl ʿAbd Allāh Anṣārī (d. 481/1081) [MS BT 309 and MS BT 144]. Apart from this, the collection includes works by local Ismaili authors such as Naẓmī-i Shughnānī (12th/18th century) [MS BT 274], Sayyid Jaʿfar b. Sayyid Tīmūr b. Sayyid Shāh Muẓaffar (13th/19th century [MS BT 161 and MS BT 162]), and Mubārak-i Wakhānī [MS BT 145, MS BT 149, MS BT 151, and MS BT 154].¹⁰⁵

Another important discovery made during the fieldwork in Badakhshān of Tajikistan was a short Ismaili *risāla* known as *Haft bāb-i Bābā Sayyidnā*. This brief work, which has been ascribed to Ḥasan-i Ṣabbāḥ, was found among the treatises in MS BT 9, MS 157 and MS BT 171 and then used as the basis of the critical edition and English translation with a proper ascription to Ḥasan-i Maḥmūd-i Kātib. The new critical edition was prepared for publication by S.J. Badakhchani in 2017.¹⁰⁶

Another working hand-list of manuscripts from Badakhshān of Afghanistan was prepared on the basis of digital copies of manuscripts identified in Badakhshān of Afghanistan since 2007. It too was written in Persian by Shohzodamamad Sherzodshoev, and then later translated into English by Mamadhusayn Alimadadshoev. The hand-list presents descriptions and codicological information on 168 manuscripts containing more than 287 titles of various lengths and genres.¹⁰⁷ A prominent place in this collection is also given to two manuscripts from the 10th/16th and 12th/18th centuries. These are MS BA 5 *Maẓhar al-ajāʾib* by Farid al-Dīn ʿAṭṭār-i Tūnī (fl. 9th/15th century) dated 10 Muḥarram 918/7 April 1512 and MS BA 46 *Majmūʿa* dated Muḥarram 1127/January–February 1715.

As part of these research projects, the ISCU at the IIS utilises codicological and palaeographic information from various hand-lists to prepare systematic catalogues of manuscripts identified in Badakhshān of Tajikistan and Afghanistan. This work is anticipated to result in the publication of catalogues in the coming years.

As part of the Manuscript Analysis Project, the ISCU commissions scholars to produce research using manuscripts in its holdings including the

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., p. 8.

¹⁰⁶ For more information, see Badakhchani, *Spiritual Resurrection in Shiʿi Islam*, pp. 37–42.

¹⁰⁷ N. Nourmamdochoev, *Analytical Mapping of Persian Manuscripts from Badakhshan of Afghanistan: Revised version* (November 2019), pp. 2, 5–6.

digital copies referred to above. Scholars such as Shozodamamad Sherzodshoev, Jalal Badakhchani, Shafique Virani, Umed Sherzodshoev, Orkhan Mir-Kasimov, Karim Javan, Otambek Mastibekov, Nourmamadcho Nourmamadchoev, Daniel Beben, Shaftolu Gulamadov and many others, work on manuscripts from these collections.

Several articles featuring a discussion of some of the manuscripts digitised by the project in Khārūgh will form part of the conference proceedings to be published by the IIS under the title *Texts, Scribes and Transmission: Manuscript Cultures of the Ismaili Communities and Beyond*. These articles were originally presented at a symposium organised by the Ismaili Special Collections Unit in 2017.¹⁰⁸

Post-Soviet Scholarship on the Ismailis

In the last two decades, many volumes of academic writing on Islam have been produced by scholars in Russia. These include *Khrestomatiia po Islamu* (Readings on Islam) edited by the Russian Orientalist, Stanislav M. Prozorov.¹⁰⁹ The work does not deal directly with the Ismailis or Ismaili studies. Prozorov himself argues that the aim of the book is to help the Russian-speaking audience, for the first time in the post-Soviet period, gain an impartial and accurate view of the religion of Islam as an elaborate and flexible ideological system. This was seen as a new area of Islamic Studies in Russian scholarship. The editor introduces three dimensions of Islamic history and discusses the problem of correlation between the fundamental principles of doctrinal Islam and their regional interpretations in multifarious social, cultural and ethnic contexts.

In the post-Soviet era, a wealth of new studies has been produced on the history, religion, culture and tradition of the Ismailis of Central Asia. Among Tajik scholars, mention can be made of the work of Khaēlbek Dodikhudoev, Abusaid Shokhumorov, N. Davlatbekov, Kudratbek Ēl'chibekov, Elbon Hojibekov, Sunatullo Jonboboev, Tohir Qalandarov, Hokim Qalandarov, Davlat Niyozbekov, Abdulmamad Iloliev, Muzaffar

¹⁰⁸ I would like to thank Dr(s) Wafi Momen and Nourmamadcho Nourmamadchoev of the Ismaili Special Collections Unit at the IIS for their support and their help in providing updates on the manuscript project in Khārūgh, Tajikistan.

¹⁰⁹ S.M. Prozorov, ed., *Khrestomatiia po Islamu* [Readings on Islam] (Moscow, 1994).

Zoolshoev, Nourmamadcho Nourmamadchoev, Otambek Mastibekov, Shaftolu Gulamadov, as well as those of a small number of Western scholars with Alice Hunsberger, Daniel Beben and Jo-Ann Gross undoubtedly being among the most significant.¹¹⁰

Scholars and research on the Ismailis in the post-Soviet era can be divided into three categories: (i) scholars influenced by Soviet or Marxist historical materialism despite the collapse of the Communist regime; (ii) scholars who have embarked on Ismaili studies since the disintegration of the Soviet Union, who have not been greatly affected by Soviet scholarship, and who can also access the relevant literature in Western languages; and (iii) scholars approaching Ismaili studies from Western perspectives including Western scholars and indigenous Tajik scholars who have received a Western education.

One of the publications that appeared in 1996 was *Anglo-Russkoie Sopernichestvo v Tsentral'noi Azii i Ismailizm* (Anglo-Russian Rivalry in Central Asia and Ismailism) by Leonid N. Khariukov, a military serviceman who served in Badakhshān during the Soviet era. He had access to archival material including some private sources and his work conforms to Soviet ideology even though it was published several years after the collapse of the Soviet Union. He expresses a biased attitude towards Ismaili history and particularly towards what he sees as Aga Khan III's pro-British stance in the international arena. Although Khariukov's book falls far short of being an academic work, it is however valuable in terms of utilising unpublished material.

As already mentioned, the foremost scholar in the study of Ismaili philosophy during the Soviet and post-Soviet eras, is the Tajik academician Khaëlbek Dodikhudoev whose scholarship was introduced and examined in the previous section.¹¹¹ It is imperative for us to examine and assess his stance on Ismaili studies in the post-Soviet era given that his case reveals how in the Soviet era, the official ideology constrained him and his colleagues in their approach to the Ismailis and their faith.

In his recent work *Filosofskii Ismailism* (2014), Dodikhudoev admits that in the totalitarian atmosphere engendered by the prevailing Communist ideology Ismaili studies was not a safe option for any Soviet scholar.¹¹²

¹¹⁰ More details on their works are provided in Chapter 3.

¹¹¹ See, *Review of the Literature on the Ismailis in Soviet Scholarship*, pp. 71–90.

¹¹² Khaëlbek Dodikhudoev, *Filosofskii ismailizm* [Philosophical Ismailism] (Dushanbe, 2014), pp. 6–7.

For this reason, many aspects of Ismaili history remained unexplored, even though considerable work on the study of Ismaili history, religious belief, doctrine and philosophy had been undertaken by scholars in other parts of the world. Nevertheless, according to Dodikhudoev, as regards the medieval era, the Ismailis were viewed by the Soviet authorities as a branch of Shi'ī Islam with a rational philosophy and shared with the other branches a long history of tragic events going back to the middle of the 2nd/8th century.¹¹³ According to Dodikhudoev, the Ismaili legacy in the history of Islamic thought and Iranian philosophy and culture is unique due to the contributions made by Ismaili thinkers from the 3rd/9th to the early 14th/20th century. He argues that this contribution is primarily based on the following: 1) the Ismailis were amongst the first in Islamic history to compose works on philosophy and science in the Persian language, replacing Arabic usually used for these subjects (*Umm al-kitāb*, al-Sijistānī, Nāṣir-i Khusraw); 2) the Ismailis added the comparative study of religion and the philosophy of religion to the scholarship of their time (Abū Ḥātim al-Rāzī); 3) in their writings they formed a synthesis of Islamic prophetic wisdom and ancient philosophy (al-Nasafī, al-Rāzī, al-Sijistānī, al-Kirmānī, al-Shīrāzī, Nāṣir-i Khusraw and many others); 4) in scientific and religious thought, the Ismailis developed rationalism and raised up the role of reason (Abū Mūsā Jābir b. Ḥayyān, Ibn al-Haytham and other Ismaili philosophers, including the authors of the *Rasā'il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'*); 5) they were the first to carry out experiments in chemistry and optics (Jābir b. Ḥayyān, Ibn al-Haytham); 6) they created the first encyclopaedia in the form of the *Rasā'il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'*; 7) they established the world's first university, al-Azhar, in Cairo; 8) they developed the concept of sacred history in Islam; 9) they were the first group in Iran to create a national liberation movement to counter the domination of the Turkic tribes (the Nizārī Ismaili movement in Iran, from the 5th/11th to the 7th/13th century); 10) they established the first people's state in the history of Islam (Ḥasan-i Ṣabbāḥ).¹¹⁴ However, he concludes, not all of these elements and contributions in terms of science and civilisation have been fully investigated and studied.

Abusaid Shokhumorov's final work *Razdelenie Badakhshana i sud'by Ismailizma* discusses the major events of the late 19th and early 20th centuries in Badakhshān and their impact on the Ismailis of the region.

¹¹³ Ibid., p. 13.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

The author examines the main reasons for the ultimate subjugation and division of Badakhshān between the colonial powers. He also assesses and examines the major role played during the partitioning of Badakhshān by the religious and political figures of the time. The work presents a new approach to the study of historical events in the region, with the author questioning some of the assumptions of previous scholars.¹¹⁵ Even though Shokhumorov attempted to introduce a new approach to the study of the Central Asian Ismailis, which should have been different from the Soviet one, still the work suffers from certain shortcomings as occasionally the claims regarding certain historical events are not supported by evidence.

Kudratbek Ėl'chibekov's work takes into account the theory of the hierarchy of the clergy discussed earlier, making use of a large number of the Ismaili sources discovered in Badakhshān during the expeditions carried out between 1957 and 1963. However, Ėl'chibekov's study is still in line with the Soviet approach to the study of religion in which the development of the Ismaili movement was interpreted as an instance of 'class struggle' taking place in medieval Muslim society.

Elbon Hojibekov's work presents an analysis of the little-known activities of the Ismaili *pīrs* in the political life of the Pamir region, particularly in the Shughnān district, between the end of the 13th/19th and the first half of the 20th century. Even though Hojibekov's work suffers from misreading and misquotation of the primary and secondary sources, the work is important because it includes a trove of recorded material and interviews that he conducted.

The Russian scholar, Andreĭ Vadimovich Smirnov (b. 1958), who studied Ismaili philosophy, wrote in his introduction to the Russian translation of al-Kirmānī's work *Rāḥat al-ʿaql*:

Among the many discoveries of our century, we can rightly count the world's discovery of Ismaili philosophy. For centuries surrounded by an aura of mystery, generating fanciful and not always friendly legends, this most mysterious of the Shi'i Islamic sects has only in recent decades allowed the publication of the key works of its theoretical thought.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁵ Shokhumorov, *Razdelenie Badakhshana*. The unexpected death of Abusaid Shokhumorov in 1999 delayed the publication of this monograph for almost nine years but with the support of his friends and family members it was published in 2008.

¹¹⁶ Ḥamid al-Dīn al-Kirmānī, *Uspokoenie razuma [Rāḥat al-ʿaql]*. Vvedenie, perevod s arabskogo i kommentarii A.V. Smirnova [Intr., and tr., from Arabic with a commentary by A.V. Smirnov]. (Moscow, 1995), p. 5.

Another academic, Muso Dinorshoev, in the introduction to an edition of *Zād al-musāfirīn*,¹¹⁷ identified reasons for the persecution of the Ismailis in the medieval period under various Muslim empires. He writes:

[T]his phenomenon was due to several reasons. First, with their new call announcing happiness, justice and equality the Ismailis attracted the attention of various sectors of society. Secondly, of all the religious movements, sects and schools, only the Ismailis called for resistance to the Saljūq invaders. This patriotic call of the Ismailis was perceived positively by noble people and was headed by a true patriot such as Nāṣir-i Khusraw. On this basis, we can surely say that the persecution and oppression of Nāṣir by the Saljūqs had confessional and political reasons.¹¹⁸

Since the disintegration of the Soviet Union, several books have been published on the Ismaili community, which have more or less demonstrated impartiality and which have given credit to the Ismaili community and their imam for their work in the development of health services, educational programmes and economic growth all over the world. Sergei Plekhanov's *Raskrytaia Ladon': Aga-Khan i Ego Mūrīdy*¹¹⁹ presents in a broad historical context the significance of Aga Khan IV and his community in the world today. Plekhanov used various sources, domestic and foreign, to examine and provide a realistic picture of Ismaili movement as a unique cultural phenomenon. Plekhanov also says that his personal acquaintance with the life of the Ismaili communities and the work of AKDN institutions in different countries has enabled him not only to experience the diverse nature of AKDN programmes in the fields of economy, culture, education and health, but also to understand the Ismailis through the prism of human history.

Plekhanov further argues that the medieval Ismailis were the target of attacks by both Muslim and Christian orthodoxy, who presented them as assassins in the service of a secret organisation. He notes that it is only in recent decades that the perception has changed and people have started to understand that the bizarre legends circulating about the Ismailis were spawned to create an ideology of intolerance. Plekhanov's book serves as a

¹¹⁷ Muso Dinorshoev, *Nasir-i Khusraw i ego 'Zad al-musafirīn'* (Pripasy putnikov) [Nāṣir-i Khusraw and his *Zād al-Musāfirīn*], tr. from Tajik (Dushanbe, 2005).

¹¹⁸ Ibid., p. 12.

¹¹⁹ Sergei Plekhanov, *Raskrytaia ladon': Aga-Khan i ego Mūrīdy* [An Open Hand: the Aga-Khan and His *Murīds*] (Moscow, 2008).

source of inter-civilisational, inter-religious dialogue. It allows the Russian reader, as well as readers from the former Soviet territories, to have a better understanding of the Ismaili community and the role of its spiritual leader Aga Khan IV, one of the most prominent religious leaders in the world today.

Hokim Qalandarov's book entitled *Rūdakī va Ismoiliā*,¹²⁰ is a product of post-Soviet scholarship on the Ismailis. It considers one of the most debated topics amongst scholars of Persian literature about the life and work of the great poet Rūdakī, who is regarded as a master of Persian/Tajik poetry. The author was able to consult all the sources available in order to shed light on Rūdakī's affiliation with the Ismailis and the contribution he made to Persian poetry and his glorification of the Sāmānid state. He has also tried to highlight the differences between the Ismailis and the Qarmaṭīs who, due to hostile historical sources, were for a long time depicted as a single group.¹²¹ However, the author not only differentiates the Ismailis from the Qarmaṭīs in this study, but dismisses the notion that Rūdakī had any association with the Qarmaṭīs. Furthermore, in the course of the analysis and the study of the topic, Qalandarov was able to respond to some of the anti-Ismaili publications of recent years.

A scholar such as Otambek Mastibekov represents another interesting case in Ismaili studies which is a combination of both Soviet and Western educational backgrounds. In his work under the title *Leadership and Authority in Central Asia: the Ismaili Community in Tajikistan* (2014) he provides a detailed study on religious leadership and authority in the context of the Ismailis of Tajikistan over the last a hundred years or so. The work is rich in terms of sources in both Tajik and Russian, revealing the role of the *pīrs* and *khalīfas* in the pre-Soviet and early-Soviet periods with a particular reference to Stalin's anti-religious policy as a result of which most religious authorities, and in particular *pīrs*, were eliminated. He further argues that with the elimination of the *pīrs* as key religious figures since the 1930s, the *khalīfas* became important in the preservation of Ismaili religious knowledge not only by passing it on to the next generation, but also by concealing religious manuscripts. However, he does not elaborate on the roles of the *khalīfas* during the establishment of Imamate institutions in post-Soviet Tajikistan.

¹²⁰ Qalandarov, *Rudakī va Ismoiliā*.

¹²¹ For further on this point, see Daftary, *The Ismā'īlīs*, especially 'The Ismā'īlī-Qarmaṭī Schism of 286/899', pp. 116–126.

A study of the Darvāz district of the Gorno-Badakhshān region, where a small Ismaili community lives surrounded by a Sunni majority, was published by another Russian scholar, Nadezhda Emel'ianova. In the conclusion to her work she argues that a certain custom and tradition of the Darvāz Ismailis differs from those of the Ismailis in Shughnān and Rūshān.¹²² Their focus on education, which comes out of their attitude to knowledge and the activities of the AKDN institutions in the region, is obvious and she further states, 'the Ismailis are trying to improve the life of their community through economic measures and by raising their educational level'.¹²³

In addition to these individual studies, a series of conferences was organised with the support of the Institute of Ismaili Studies, London, and the Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Tajikistan. These conferences have enabled scholars and students to further their knowledge and understanding of the Ismailis and their beliefs by exploring the material collected in the course of a hundred years or so by Russian and Soviet Orientalists in Central Asia and Russia. Two large conferences were organised and sponsored by the Institute of Ismaili Studies in Khārūgh and Dushanbe (2003). Many scholars and academics were brought together at the conference to commemorate Nāṣir-i Khusraw's millennium, which ultimately resulted in the publication of a collection of articles under the title *Nāṣir-i Khusraw: Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow*¹²⁴ in English, Russian and Tajik. Even though many of Nāṣir's works were published in Tajik and Russian during the Soviet era, recent years have seen a positive surge in the publication of his works. In recent decades, with the support of the IIS in joint projects with many academics and academic institutions in Tajikistan, almost the entire corpus of Nāṣir's works and those of many other Ismaili thinkers have been translated and published, which has opened up new opportunities for research and further advances in Ismaili studies.

More recently, a conference was organised by the Institute of Ismaili Studies and the Russian Academy of Science's Institute of Oriental

¹²² Nadezhda Emel'ianova, *Darvaz: religioznaia i kul'turnaia zhizn' Tadzhiksko-Afganskogo prigranich'ia* (po materialam polevykh issledovaniï 2003–2006 gg.) [Darvāz – Religious and Cultural Life of the Tajik-Afghan Borders (based on field research between 2003 and 2006)] (Moscow, 2007), p. 107.

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Sarfaroz Niyozov and Ramazon Nazariyev, ed., *Nasir Khusraw: Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow* (Khujand, 2005).

Manuscripts in St Petersburg in celebration of the 125th anniversary of the birth of the prominent Russian Iranist, Wladimir Ivanow. Many scholars from the former Soviet countries as well as the Western world participated, including Farhad Daftary who had recently edited and annotated the English translation of Ivanow's memoirs.¹²⁵

Another factor in the changing landscape of Ismaili studies is the influence of globalisation. Globalisation and modern technology have opened up a new dimension in Ismaili studies worldwide, as most of the works on the Ismailis have now become accessible to scholars regardless of their geographical location, political and religious views, or even language.

Therefore, since the disintegration of the Soviet Union, Ismaili studies has dramatically changed and there have been many positive developments. Prior to 1917, studies were conducted in the region mostly by Russian military officers and a few scholars, who in the main were on intelligence missions, but although their work is less significant academically, it contains important material that can be regarded as primary source material.

Ismaili studies in the Soviet era resulted in the discovery of a remarkable body of Ismaili manuscripts during fieldwork in the GBAO and a range of academic publications related to Ismaili studies, in fields such as history, religion, philosophy, and ethnography. However, as argued earlier, most of the time this academic study was undermined by the imprint of Communist ideology which had profound impact on much of the literature produced. Nevertheless, the achievements of the scholarship during this period outweigh the shortcomings resulting from any ideological constraints. Since then, with the disintegration of the Soviet Union, the Ismaili community as well as scholars in the field have been provided with fresh opportunities to further their knowledge and understanding of Ismaili history and traditions in Central Asia.

¹²⁵ Stanislav M. Prozorov and Hakim Elnazarov, ed., *Russian Scholars on Ismailism* (St Petersburg, 2014).